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A VALLEY OF SHADOWS

BY

G. COLMORE

AUTHOR OF

'A LIVING EPITAPH,' 'A CONSPIRACY OF SILENCE,' ETC.

Such storms vex human souls,
That they are driven into unknown seas
And dark, strange waters : yet the Power that made
The calm, safe inland bays, made the wild waste,
And knows the great waves and the silent rocks,
And knows the whirling tempests that have tossed
The wrecked hulk stranded far away from home



IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

London

CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1892

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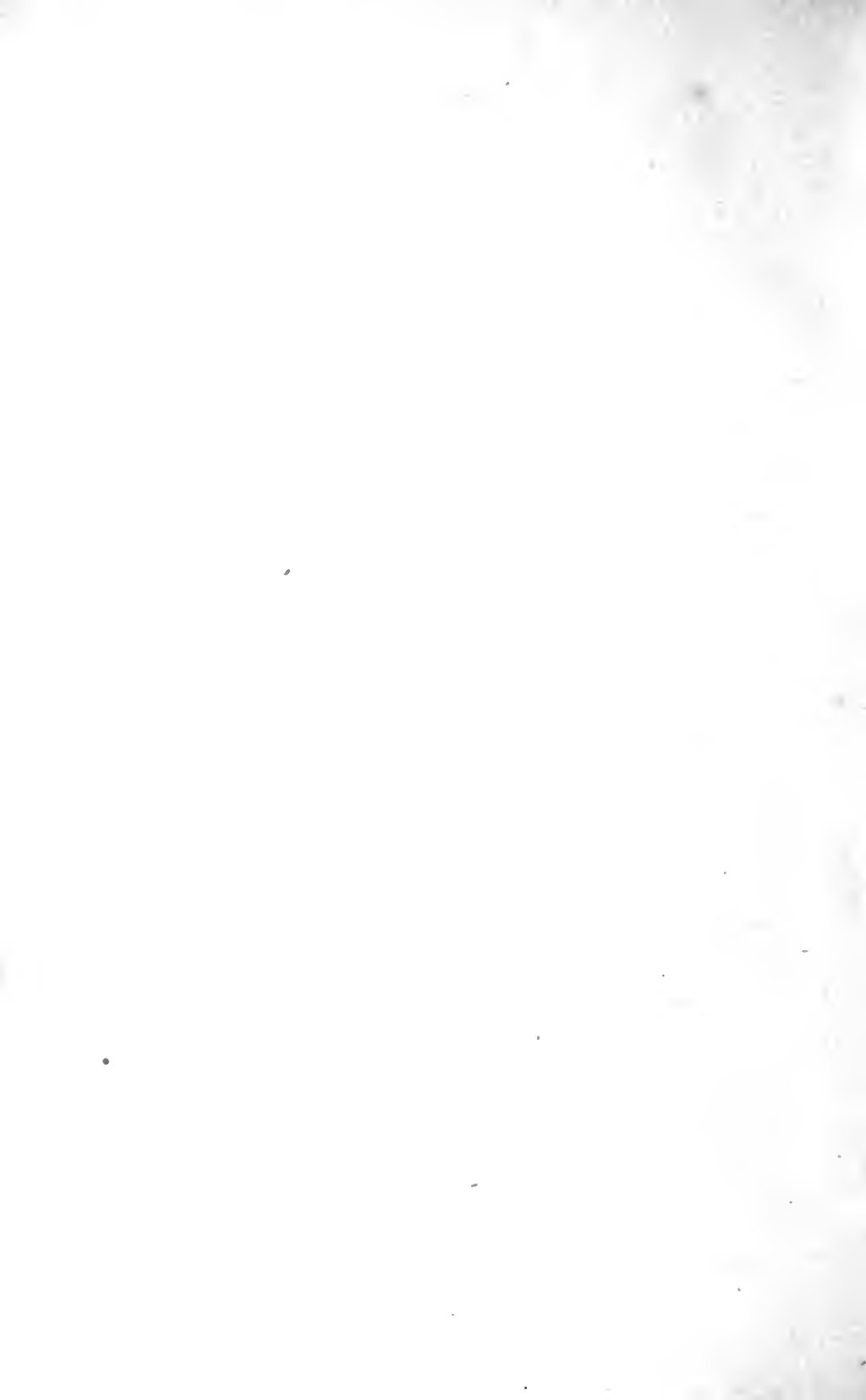
A VALLEY OF SHADOWS

Book I.

JOEL.

And Love and Pity hand in hand
Went softly, yet with searching eyes,
Past many just men, many wise,
And found no home in all the land :

Till, wandering weary and alone,
They chanced upon a lowly heart,
That lived a lowly life apart,
And found within a fitting throne



CHAPTER I.

EVERY evening at seven o'clock precisely little Dinah Hatherden said her prayers : never a minute before and never a minute after, unless the tall old clock in the corner was a minute fast or a minute slow ; and that was a thing that happened rarely, for Joel Hatherden set it every evening by his watch, having set his watch an hour previously by the Barhaven town clock. And besides this, the old clock was naturally a steady goer, with no disposition either to lag or hurry, the works being of a quality which Aunt Anne declared was not to be come across nowadays ; and the hands moved round and the ticking sounded on and on, with all the respectable regularity

which distinguished the course of Aunt Anne's own daily life.

Punctuality was Aunt Anne's watch-word, for the Lord, she said, would never have divided the night from the day and the morning from the afternoon if it had been a matter of no importance when His creatures went to bed and got up, ate their meals and performed their various duties; and waste of time, she affirmed, was waste of eternity. So, in the household of which she was mistress, every hour had its appointed task or occupation: the morning was the time for cleaning and polishing and redding up; the afternoon was the time for sitting down to sew, for meditating perhaps on the evils of the present world and the glories of a future state; and seven o'clock was the time for little Dinah to say her prayers. Thus it was that every evening at the sound of the preliminary whirr which always occurred a few minutes before the striking of the

hour, Aunt Anne would put aside her sewing, and glancing towards the little stool by the fireside, or going to the door leading into the garden, would say: ‘Dinah, leave your book’—or your play as the case might be—‘and turn your thoughts to a better world.’ Then the little subdued-looking child would, with unquestioning obedience, put away her book or come in from the summer evening outside, and kneeling down by Aunt Anne’s side, her clasped hands touching, though hardly resting upon, Aunt Anne’s gown—brown carmelite in summer, gray wincey in the winter—would wait silently till the clock had ceased to strike. When all was still again, Aunt Anne bent her head, and in her deep tones began: ‘Our Father, which art in heaven;’ and Dinah, in piping treble voice, repeated after her each petition. After the ‘Amen’ came a pause, and then: ‘O Lord, bless all this household, forgive my sins and save my soul,

and deliver me from the pains of hell ; for Christ's sake. Amen.'

Bedtime followed immediately upon prayers. Dinah rose from her knees, kissed Aunt Anne on the forehead, and went upstairs to her own little room at the top of the house, where the slanting roof sloped low over the bed, and where the dormer-window looked into a garden of fruit-trees. Besides this window opening on to the outside world, there was another one, a very small one, in the room : it was close beside the door, and gave on to a small square landing, at the other side of which was the room belonging to Aunt Anne. On the light summer evenings Dinah lay with her face turned towards the dormer-window, looking out at the sky and the topmost branches of the taller trees, and dropped off to sleep gently, amidst curious and pleasant fancies that came to her with the sight of the clouds and the sunset : but in the dark evenings

of autumn and winter she turned her face towards the wall, and drew the bedclothes high and tight about her, and strove often in vain to sleep. Terrible visions of the devil and bad angels came to her with the darkness, and the haunting thought that a pair of evil eyes was watching her through the little window by the door grew vivid in the night's black silence or the restless warfare of the wind. Next to the devil, she chiefly feared a terrible being called the Pope, on whose nature and attributes Aunt Anne discoursed from time to time. Dinah was not sure whether he lived on the earth or beneath it; she only knew that his dwelling-place was called Rome, and that he was closely connected with a scarlet woman: but the vagueness of her knowledge added to the terrors which her imagination called forth, and the thought of the Pope and his dread companion was a thought that kept her wakeful through many lonely hours. Often when Joel

Hatherden came in to look at her before going to bed, his gaze was answered by two dark bright eyes that looked strangely big for the childish face to which they belonged: but Dinah never spoke of the terrors that haunted the night; her training had made her reserved and self-contained; and between the inner world in which her imagination reigned, and the outer world in which Aunt Anne was supreme, was a closed door which she never dreamed of opening. Her mother had died when she was born; Aunt Anne was the only mother she had ever known; and Aunt Anne, like Aunt Anne's God, was a being who inspired her with more fear than love.

Anne Hatherden, brought up in the extreme tenets of evangelicalism, had imbued her religion with the sternness of her own nature. To her the God who had created all things was a God in whom justice had swallowed up mercy; to her

everything but the necessities of life was a vanity; to her in this material world there was no beauty but the beauty of holiness. In her youth she had renounced the man she was to have married because she doubted the strength of his religious convictions: in her later life her chief care was still the salvation of her own soul. She had one strong passion—her love for her only brother. He was ten years younger than herself, and from the time she was fifteen years old, Anne had guided him in things spiritual and temporal. She had laboured hard for his soul's good; she had married him to a wife of her own choosing; in his widowerhood she had taken the charge of his household and his motherless child, and done her best to guard them from the vanities and allurements of the world.

And, indeed, it seemed as if the world were far removed in every way from Little

Hollow. The long white cottage, with its low walls and high slanting roof, lay in a sheltered space, where the grass-covered hills that stretched like great green waves for miles around paused in their undulations, and sank in gentle slopes down into a quiet valley. A few trees grew about the house, and made a shield against the wind that rushed down the dips between the heights, or wound its way along the valley from the sea; a low wall shut in the garden in the front, and the fruit-trees at the back; and all around there was nothing to be seen but the sky, and the downs, and the fields that ran up towards the hills. The town of Barhaven was two miles away, and was quite shut off by a long green hill that seemed to touch the sky; and the road that came in a straight line of white down the hillside, round the curve at the bottom of the valley, and past the garden-gate of Little Hollow, had to climb, through unhedged fields, over a

space of rising ground before it reached the village of Sleepy Dale.

So Little Hollow lay all alone, and it seemed as if the life of Joel Hatherden must pass as uneventfully, and end as quietly, as the lives of his father and grandfather had done. Yet hills, be they ever so strong, cannot shut out human passion from human hearts, and creeds, be they ever so stern, cannot banish love from life ; and so it came to pass that, in spite of the hills and the solitude, and in spite of Anne Hatherden and her watchful care, love, with attendant sorrow, stole into the quiet valley, and wrought many changes in the household of Little Hollow.

CHAPTER II.

IT was half-past seven o'clock in the evening. Dinah had said her prayers and gone to bed, and Aunt Anne sat alone in the hall of Little Hollow. The hall was the chief sitting-room of the family, and ran from the front of the house to the back. At either end of it was a lattice window, in the centre of one side-wall a large open old - fashioned fireplace, and opposite the fireplace a recess in which was a long wide seat. Facing the door into the entrance-place there was another door, leading into the private room—half study, half office—of Joel Hatherden; and beyond the fireplace yet another, opening into a passage which ran along the back

of the house, past the dining-room and kitchen, to the staircase.

It was a spring evening; the light still lingered in bright crowns on the tops of the hills, fell gray and dimmed in the valleys, and came with faint strength through the lattice windows of Little Hollow. Aunt Anne's conscience was uneasy. Generally she knitted through the twilight, but to-night was one of the rare occasions on which she had no knitting on hand; and while it seemed wasteful to burn candles before the daylight was quite gone, she yet could not see to sew, and idleness was a waste of time.

So through the dusk she sat in perplexity, trying to concentrate her thoughts on self-examination, yet with many a doubtful glance towards the pile of household linen on the table, till at last the day was dead, and thickening darkness warranted the striking of a match. She rose, lighted the

candles, and drew the curtains, pausing for a moment to peer out into the night before she covered the window to the front.

‘Joel is late,’ she muttered; ‘I doubt his business holds too large a place in his heart.’

She shook her head, then went back to her chair by the fireplace, and taking some of the linen from the table, gave her whole attention to darning.

By-and-by there was a crunching of the gravel outside, a scraping of feet on the step, the sound of the front door opening, a stamping on the mat, and then a pause while Joel Hatherden took off his coat and hat, and hung them up. Aunt Anne knew all the sounds very well, and the length the pause would be; evening after evening, wet or fine, her brother entered his house in just the same way; and she looked up from her work precisely a moment before he raised the latch

of the inner door and came into the hall.

‘You are late, brother!’

‘Yes, I suppose—no doubt I am a little late.’

Joel Hatherden spoke deprecatingly. He was a small man, with a rather nervous manner; his mouth and chin were hidden by a beard; his eyes had a kindly, almost wistful, light in them.

‘I hope I have not kept you waiting? It is not supper-time yet?’

‘It wants five minutes of the hour,’ Aunt Anne replied.

‘I shall be quite ready in five minutes.’

Joel Hatherden went out of the hall by the door leading towards the staircase, and came back just as the old clock in the corner was sending forth the first stroke of the hour. He took out his watch—an old-fashioned gold repeater—and looked at it.

‘Quite right,’ he said; ‘that clock is

wonderfully steady; it hardly varies by a minute from month's end to month's end.'

'A deal more than can be said for many of those that needs no winding up,' Aunt Anne remarked; 'folks waste a deal of time—never to speak of mere losing.'

'Do you mean that for me, Anne?' Joel asked gently, and with a faint, wintry gleam of amusement in his eyes.

'Whether I mean it for you or not, brother, the saying can do you no harm if your conscience makes you free of it,' answered Aunt Anne, as she led the way into the dining-room.

'What made you so late to-night?' she asked presently, breaking the silence in which supper had begun.

'I had forgotten—I did not notice it was so late. Some new books arrived to-day; I was looking through them.'

Aunt Anne shook her head, but said nothing.

‘You do not like my books,’ said Joel. ‘Yet there is nothing evil in good books.’

‘I mistrust worldly learning,’ answered Aunt Anne; ‘the Bible and his own soul—there, it seems to me, is study enough and to spare for every Christian; and I cannot but think, Joel, that had you kept to the farm like your father before you, instead of letting the land to others and going to find your meat and drink in a stuffy library—and the dust alone shows the sort of places they are—you would have trod in a safer path, and one more likely to lead you in the narrow way.’

‘I was always fond of books,’ Joel answered, after a pause; ‘it was a sort of natural feeling with me; and when the library was started, and Mr. Redmond, knowing I would never make a farmer, and how all my delight was in reading, offered me a post in it, it seemed—you remember I said to you at the time—it

seemed as if the hand of the Lord was showing me the way to go.'

'The devil has many wiles,' said Aunt Anne.

'And I have prospered,' Joel went on; 'I am the chief there now, and the life suits me. I would never have done on the land.'

"In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread,"' quoted Aunt Anne; 'and there's no sweat in book-learning. A farmer's life next to a minister of the Gospel—and all have not the gifts—is the best life a man can live: seed-time and harvest, summer and winter—through it all he sees the power of the Lord; and being dependent for his living on the sunshine and the rain, keeps him humble in his mind, and thankful for temporal blessings.'

'Books make a man humble enough,' observed Joel.

'Book-learning and such-like,' Aunt

Anne went on, without noticing the observation, 'is only fit for the rich and idle—such as Mr. Redmond. None but a child of this world would give the greater part of his fortune to found a library, when so many souls are lost and perishing.'

'Well, well,' was all Joel said. It was an answer he often made, and one that usually put an end to discussion.

Aunt Anne looked at him across the table.

'I speak only for your good, brother,' she said. 'Books never saved a soul; and it's souls the Almighty wants—not brains.'

She rose from her chair, and Joel followed her back to the hall. He took a pipe from the high mantelpiece, seated himself by the fireside, and puffed forth slowly big, even puffs of smoke, his eyes fixed on the flames before him, his thin, slender hands lying folded on his knees.

His sister went on with her darning, and a quarter of an hour passed by in silence. Then Anne spoke.

‘Joel, I saw Churchwarden Hargreaves to-day.’

Joel started at the sound of her voice, turned a little in his chair, and said absently :

‘Did you?’

‘Yes. He is much exercised.’

‘Indeed?’

There was a little pause.

‘Did you hear what I said, brother?’ asked Anne, after a glance at the thoughtful face.

‘I—yes—I am a little tired to-night.’

Joel roused himself, and sat upright.

‘Churchwarden Hargreaves is exercised, you say? He is generally—very often exercised, I think.’

‘Yes; he is a watchful servant.’

‘Who is he watching now?’ asked Joel, his eyes going back to the fire.

‘He fears—he is much concerned about Mrs. Latimer. Do you know the woman I mean? She came to the house near the seashore about a year ago.’

‘Yes, I know; I was just thinking about her.’

‘Thinking about her? Did you, perhaps, meet the churchwarden? I think he said he was going on to Barhaven.’

‘No; I met Mrs. Latimer.’

‘I fear there is a mystery about that woman,’ Aunt Anne said solemnly.

‘Perhaps. There is something, at any rate, that makes her face not quite like other people’s faces.’

‘There is a look of the world about her,’ said Aunt Anne.

‘There is a look of suffering,’ added Joel.

Aunt Anne pursed up her lips.

‘Suffering and sin—the two go mostly side by side,’ she said.

‘I see no reason why we should credit

her with sin,' Joel went on, with a mild remonstrance in his tone; 'she seems to me just a poor, solitary woman.'

'I mistrust solitary women,' said Aunt Anne dryly. 'Poor she is not,' she added, after a pause. 'Her house is full of pictures and ornaments, Bessie Hargreaves says; and she keeps a regular servant, besides Mrs. Tuckford going in once a week to scrub. And look at her clothes, too!'

'I have never noticed her clothes,' said Joel meekly.

'Her clothes is fine, worldly sort of clothes. She's dressed different to anybody else in Sleepy Dale.'

'There seems a sort of elegance about her, certainly,' Joel said reflectively; 'but I didn't think of its being the clothes.'

'Clothes makes a deal of difference; and fine garments is a snare to them that look, as well as to them that wear. The Bible's against fine dressing, plain enough; and, for my part, I never knew a body

with a saved soul inside it that looked to clothes for glorification. Think of your poor wife, Joel ; was she one to strive after pleasing the eye ?’

‘No, no,’ answered Joel hastily ; ‘she was not.’

‘Yet she had the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, and was firm in her duty to her husband and her God.’

‘She was a good woman,’ said Joel gently.

He waited a minute, drew in a long whiff from his pipe, and then went on speaking with some hesitation.

‘But from the beginning God has always made some women beautiful ; Eve was beautiful, I take it, and Rebecca, and many that we read of in Scripture. A good binding mostly means a good book—one that’s worth the calf ; and I don’t see that a good appearance in man or woman need mean a cutting off from grace. There’s little Dinah, now ; I should be sorry to think——’

‘Never mind Dinah,’ interrupted Aunt Anne. ‘She has her grandmother’s face; and though she may meet Satan in it, yet I trust that, with a proper bringing up, it will not stand in the way of her salvation—for we are all, as you say, as the Lord made us. But this woman—it’s not her face—it’s the gowns below it, and the bonnets above it, that puts me against her.’

‘She comes from London, doesn’t she? The ways there are different to our ways, and maybe her clothes come from London too.’

‘Clothes come from the heart,’ said Aunt Anne decisively, ‘wherever you may chance to buy them. But clothes or no clothes, the woman has deceived us, and I doubt no good will come of it.’

‘Deceived us? What has she done? I didn’t know you had ever spoken to her.’

‘Nor have I—I was never one to go

gadding after new friends, as you know. But Bessie Hargreaves, she's young, and young folks like strange faces, and so she's been and spent an hour now and again with this Mrs. Latimer as she calls herself. And when she was there yesterday afternoon, there was a book lying on the table, and she took it up to look at it, and inside was written—Lucy Saryll.'

'Well?'

'Well? What do you mean by "well"? Is it well, do you think, to have one name for one thing and one for another?'

'It may have been her name before she was married.'

Aunt Anne shook her head.

'The date was September a year ago, and she owns to having a son that's close on fifteen.'

'Well, it might not be her name at all; it might be a book belonging to a friend.'

Again Aunt Anne shook her head.

‘I doubt it, though that’s what she said after a bit ; but Bessie Hargreaves couldn’t believe she spoke the truth. For when Bessie said, never thinking any harm : “Is this your book, Mrs. Latimer? Was Saryll ever your name?” she got all red and then white, and she snatched the book out of Bessie’s hand, and she said twice over : “It is not my name ;” and she spoke in a curious sort of a way, Bessie said, and seemed half in a passion and half frightened.’

‘Maybe she didn’t like being questioned,’ put in Joel.

‘Maybe not—I’m not over-fond of questioning myself ; but questions don’t make you go white and red if the true answer’s got no shame in it. She quieted down after a minute, and then she said that the book belonged to a friend of hers ; but she seemed strange and confused all the time Bessie was there, and I make no doubt in my own mind that what she said was a lie.’

‘There are some poor folks who are frightened into lies, as you may say,’ said Joel. His voice sank. ‘I fancy the Lord will not be so hard, perhaps, on such.’

‘A lie is always a lie, brother, and grace is stronger than fear.’

‘Well, well,’ said Joel, and he shook the ashes from his pipe.

There was a short silence, broken by the whirr of the clock in the corner and the striking of a single stroke.

‘Half-past nine,’ said Aunt Anne; ‘it is time for prayers.’

She opened the door that faced the passage leading to the kitchen, and rang a little hand-bell; and a servant girl, stout, clumsy and demure, came in and took a seat at the end of the hall. Then Joel Hatherden read out of the family Bible, that had belonged first to his great-grandfather, and prayed out of a large, musty-smelling book with a worn brown leather cover. After prayers the lights were put out, the ashes

of the fire were raked together, and the brother and sister parted for the night.

In her own room Aunt Anne prayed long and earnestly. Joel was getting very loose notions about the Lord and His dealings, she feared ; and in the dark—for she was careful to put out the candle after the ten minutes she allowed herself for getting into bed—she prayed far into the night for her brother's soul ; then, striking a light, she sought her Bible and found the place where it is written that the fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much ; and so lay down comforted, and fell asleep.

CHAPTER III.

THE next evening Joel Hatherden left Barhaven about six o'clock. The sun lay low behind him, and the light was waning; by the time he reached the place where the short cut over the hill branched off from the main road, the gold had changed to gray and the peaceful sky was darkening. There was no roadway up the steep grassy slope that faced Barhaven; the wall of down ran up in one long stretch of green, and no tree broke the waving line that marked the brow of the hill. But to-night the line was broken: a woman's figure rose dark and motionless against the evening sky. She stood very still—so still that to the man gazing up at her the fancy

came that the figure before him was not a human figure, but that a bit of the hillside, weary of the earth, had striven to climb on beyond its appointed limit and reach to heaven. The dying day still lingered overhead, and made a pale light behind the woman as she stood; and beyond her, in the horizon far away, a faint star showed itself. Joel paused in his walking, and looked at the motionless figure and the star shining dim beyond; and always in his thoughts the two remained side by side.

Presently he moved on, but slowly and with hesitation: it seemed to him that a spell lay over the familiar landscape, and he feared to break it. As he neared the brow of the hill, the woman moved, turned, and faced him, and in the dim light he recognised Mrs. Latimer. She started a little when she saw him, and then she said:

‘You pass this way every night. You are Mr. Hatherden, I think?’

‘Yes, madam.’

The last word was added after a hardly perceptible pause; the woman had always inspired Joel with a feeling of reverence and pity; the thought of her, lonely, friendless, different from the people amongst whom she lived, was a thought that had been often with him during the past months; the sight of her face as she had passed him many a time on his way to and from Barhaven was a sight that he saw always when Anne or the neighbours had talked of her with suspicion or dislike: now that he spoke to her for the first time, the sympathy that had been silent so long strove to show itself, but it seemed to him that the only way in which he could pay her respect was to address her as ‘madam.’

‘And you live in the low white house there amongst the trees,’ the woman went on. ‘And you have a little girl—a little girl who wears a brown dress and a checked cotton pinafore.’ In the dim light Joel

could see that she smiled. ‘You see that I know all about you.’

‘Yes ; and yet——’

‘And yet ? You wonder that I should know so much about people I have never spoken to ; and you lead a busy life, and have not time to trouble about your neighbours. But I’—the words lingered a little—‘I have nothing to do but pass the days.’

‘It must be lonely—living all alone.’

‘Yes, it is lonely. That is why I come here, sometimes, in the evening, and look all round at the sea and the village and the roofs of Barhaven. It is less lonely here than in the house, and this’—the woman’s voice sank—‘this is the worst time of the day.’

‘The twilight ?’

‘Yes ; I generally come out when it begins, and wait till the darkness comes. But I am keeping you from going home. Good-night, Mr. Hatherden.’

‘ Good-night, madam.’

Suddenly the woman turned towards Joel again.

‘ I am very lonely this evening. May I walk a little bit down the road with you ?’

‘ Yes, certainly ; but I—it is going out of your way.’

‘ That does not matter ; my way is any way ; and, besides, I can go past your house and round through the village. I shall be home quite soon enough.’

So Joel and his new companion went on together, over the grass, towards the road. At first they walked in silence, but presently Mrs. Latimer began to talk again.

‘ I had such a longing to speak to somebody to-night,’ she said. ‘ Do you ever have that—a sort of craving to be amongst your fellow-creatures ?’

‘ I don’t know. I live mostly amongst books.’

‘Ah yes, of course. I do not care for books.’

‘But the neighbours?’ Joel ventured to say after a pause. ‘You have friends; you know some of them?’

‘No, only one or two, just to speak to now and again; and they are not——’

‘They are not like you,’ Joel said quickly, as she hesitated. ‘You are different from the people about here.’

‘Do you think so?’ In the thickening dusk Joel felt rather than saw that she smiled again. ‘I suppose I am. But it is not that; I must not—I mean, I do not care to know people much; and, besides, they—they are suspicious of me, they do not like me.’

‘How do you know?’ asked Joel quickly in his surprise.

‘Ah, now you have told me that I am right. But I always know; I am very clever in that way; I can always tell whether people are kind or hard, and

whether they like me or not. Now, you—I feel sure that you are kind, and I know—I think, that is to say—that you do not look upon me as the people about here look upon me.’

‘I have always been sorry for you.’

The words came almost before Joel knew he had spoken, and he felt when he had said them as if they were an impertinence.

Mrs. Latimer said only :

‘Why?’

‘I—don’t quite know. You seemed to me a poor solitary kind of woman ; perhaps it was that.’

‘It is my wish to be solitary ; I do not care to be with people ; it is my choice.’

A hard note had come into the woman’s voice, and she spoke quickly. She walked on a few paces in silence, and then stopped abruptly.

‘I think I will go back up the hill.’

she said. 'I will not go through the village, after all.'

Joel hesitated, awkward and uncomfortable.

'I—hope I have not offended you, madam. I am not used to—company.'

The woman laughed lightly, and her voice was soft and sweet again as she answered.

'Oh no ; it is not that ; you have been very good to me. Good-night, Mr. Hatherden.'

'Good-night.'

Joel stood alone on the road, and watched the retreating figure disappear in the growing darkness ; then, slowly, he turned to go down the hill. But evil fortune waited on his steps. The light was feeble now, and the way indistinct, and a loose stone in the roadway caused him to trip and stumble. He strove to recover his balance, but in the effort to do so his foot twisted under him, and he fell to the

ground with a cry of pain. For a minute he lay half stunned by the fall, then tried to rise ; but the pain in his foot became intense when he moved, and with a groan he sank back again. Then dimly he heard a voice.

‘ Did you call ? Did anyone call ? ’

There was a pause, and the voice came nearer.

‘ Did anyone call ? ’ and down the darkened road above him Joel saw a figure coming with slow, hesitating steps.

‘ It is nothing,’ he said feebly. ‘ I have hurt my foot a little, that is all.’

The figure came nearer.

‘ Is it you, Mr. Hatherden ? What is it ? ’

‘ It is nothing,’ repeated Joel ; ‘ I shall be all right presently. I am sorry that you should have come back.’

‘ You ought to be glad ; you would have lain here all night if I had not come. Take my hand and try to pull

yourself up. Do not be afraid ; I am very strong.'

'I—I cannot ; I am sorry—the pain is too great—I cannot move.'

'No, I see you cannot. Well, lie down ; I will go to your house and get help.'

'Oh no, Anne——'

'Is Anne your sister ? I will not frighten her ; don't be afraid.'

'No, it is not that, but she—I mean you—I am sure I shall be better presently.'

Mrs. Latimer had taken off her shawl, and she laid it over the prostrate figure.

'This will keep you warmer while I am gone,' she said, and then she set off rapidly down the hill.

Joel Hatherden lay on the ground and looked up at the sky, where shy stars were beginning to show themselves. The night was very peaceful, and in the still air was a faint perfume of some sweet scent unknown to him : it came, he found, from the shawl that Mrs. Latimer had spread over his

shoulders, and in spite of the pain he suffered, it seemed good to him to lie there under the stars, in the shelter of the hill, with the strange fragrance scenting the night air.

CHAPTER IV.

IN the hall of Little Hollow the clock was striking seven. Dinah knelt by Aunt Anne's side, her hands clasped, her eyes closed, waiting for the silence. Soon it fell, and the two voices began the evening prayers. Before they had ceased, a rapid footstep crossed the gravel path outside, and a knock came on the outer door; then after a moment's pause the latch was lifted, and the inner door into the hall was opened.

Aunt Anne did not move or raise her eyes.

‘Save my soul, O Lord, and deliver me from the pains of hell, for Christ's sake. Amen.’

The voices went slowly on to the end of the prayer; then Aunt Anne looked up, and Dinah rose from her knees. The child had expected to see her father, and turned with an eager look of welcome on her face; but it was not her father, it was a woman who stood there just within the doorway. Dinah had never seen anybody like her before: there was a grace in her pose and in her dress, a certain air of elegance and refinement about her, that appealed to the child's instinctive love of beauty: as the woman stood there with slightly parted lips and flushed cheeks, the childish eyes fixed upon her grew round with admiration and astonishment. The woman stepped forward.

‘I came in rather unceremoniously,’ she said; ‘but it was necessary. I heard voices, and time——’

‘You are Mrs. Latimer, I think.’

Aunt Anne's voice, hard and stern, broke in upon the clear, soft tones of her visitor;

Aunt Anne's face, set and cold, showed no sign of welcome.

‘Yes, I am Mrs. Latimer. I came because—to tell you—your brother has met with a slight accident.’

‘My brother?’ Aunt Anne moved suddenly forward, and her lips quivered; then her voice grew calm again. ‘What is it? Is he—much hurt?’

‘Oh no, it is nothing serious; it is only—he fell coming down the hill, I think, and seems to have twisted his foot.’

‘Where is he?’

‘On the road—about half-way up the hill. He will need help; he cannot walk home.’

Aunt Anne went to the door at the end of the hall, opened it and called :

‘Phœbe!’

She went out a little way along the passage.

‘Phœbe, go up to the farmyard, and ask old John to put a horse in the light

cart. As quick as may be, tell him, and when it is ready, to come round to the garden gate.'

Then she came back into the hall.

'I thank you for coming, Mrs. Latimer,' she said stiffly. 'Will you sit down and rest a bit?'

'No, thank you. I will go home now, if there is nothing I can do to help you.'

'There is nothing. I will get together some cushions and rugs to put in the cart, and then I will go on at once to my brother. Dinah, why have you not gone to bed?'

Dinah had stolen gradually nearer and nearer to Mrs. Latimer, and now stood close beside her. She was irresistibly attracted by a long fur boa which the visitor wore round her neck, and which fell down to her knees; she longed to stroke it—it looked so soft and warm and beautiful; and she had just ventured to put forth a little hand and touch the fur, when

Aunt Anne spoke. She drew back in guilty confusion, and glanced at the face above her, fearful of reproof; but the woman looked down at her and smiled.

‘Go to bed at once, Dinah,’ said Aunt Anne.

The child walked half-way across the room, then stopped and hesitated.

‘Is father ill, Aunt Anne?’ she ventured to ask. ‘Mayn’t I stay up and see him?’

‘Certainly not. Your father has hurt his foot, and you would only be in the way. You will please him best by being good and obedient.’

Dinah’s face fell, and she moved towards the door. Mrs. Latimer followed her.

‘Will you give me a kiss, little girl, before you go?’

‘Oh yes!’

The child turned eagerly and raised her face, and Mrs. Latimer stooped down and kissed it.

‘I must go at once,’ said Aunt Anne; ‘I make no excuses. You are welcome to sit down and rest a bit, but I must go to my brother. I fear he will come to harm out there in the cold.’

‘Yes, he must be cold, though the evening is mild for the time of year. No, thank you, I will not stay. Good-night, Miss Hatherden.’

‘Good-night.’

Mrs. Latimer passed out of the open door, and a few minutes later Anne Hatherden, with a thick shawl over her arm, went out of the garden gate and up the hill. She walked rapidly, and was panting for breath when she reached the place where her brother lay.

‘Brother, are you much hurt?’

‘No, I think not—so long as I keep still. But I fear I cannot walk, Anne.’

‘No. The cart is coming; it will be here soon. Are you very cold? See, I have brought a cushion; try to move on

to it. And this shawl—it will keep you warm.’

‘I have not been cold. I had—a shawl.’

‘How? who? Is it Mrs. Latimer’s shawl?’

‘Yes. She was very kind, sister.’

Aunt Anne felt the shawl that lay over her brother’s shoulders.

‘It’s not very warm,’ she said, ‘and—I believe it’s scented; I never could abide imitation smells. Put this over it, Joel; there’s no scent on it, but it’s got plenty of body.’

Joel submitted patiently. The stars seemed less gentle now, and he was more conscious of the pain in his foot; the dream feeling that had seemed to fill the atmosphere had vanished with Anne’s coming; and he was glad when the cart drew near.

In her bed at Little Hollow, Dinah lay wide awake; but there was no fear to-

night in her sleepless eyes ; the Devil, the Pope, and the Scarlet Woman troubled her not at all. Her inward vision rested on the figure she had seen that evening on rising from her knees, and she was filled with wondering enthusiasm and delight. ‘ It was all beautiful,’ she thought—‘ her clothes, and her face, and the way she smiled at me. The Queen of Sheba must have looked like that. I will never forget her ; I will love her always.’

The child slipped out of bed, knelt down, and folded her hands.

‘ I will love her,’ she said out loud—‘ I will love her for ever and ever. Amen.’

Then she crept back into bed again, and very soon she fell asleep.

CHAPTER V.

JOEL HATHERDEN had sprained his ankle, and it was some time before he was able to walk again. The days passed slowly. He missed his walk to and from Barhaven, he missed seeing his fellow-creatures at the library, he missed his books. He had a few in his own room at Little Hollow, but they were only a few, and were mostly religious works of the last century. Now and again a neighbour came in to ask after him, and to tell him the little trivial news of Sleepy Dale ; but Aunt Anne did not approve of idle chatter, and those who confined their conversation to earthly topics were soon made to feel that a long visit was undesirable. Once Mrs. Latimer

came ; Joel was lying on the couch in his study ; the door leading into the hall was ajar, and he could hear her voice as she stood in the little entrance place.

‘ I have come to ask for your brother, Miss Hatherden. I hope he is better.’

‘ Thank you. He is doing very well, the doctor says.’

‘ Will he be laid up long, do you think ? It must be very wearisome for him to be shut up like this.’

‘ I cannot tell when he will be about again ; it will be when the Lord wills. And he is not one to grumble and complain ; he knows that trials are sent us for our good.’

Aunt Anne’s face expressed stern reproof ; in her voice was no trace of welcome. Mrs. Latimer hesitated, then turned away, and she did not come again.

Aunt Anne went back to Joel on his couch.

‘You might have asked her in for a bit, sister,’ said Joel timidly.

‘Her ways are not our ways,’ answered Aunt Anne. ‘We could have no fellowship with her.’

‘It is a good step down here from the sea. Just to ask her to rest—it could have done no harm.’

‘She walks a deal about the place, I hear; a mile or so wouldn’t come hard to her.’

‘Well, well!’ said Joel, and he took up his book again.

‘Churchwarden Hargreaves will be in by-and-by,’ said Anne, pausing by the doorway. ‘He’s obliged to go to London to-morrow, and he said he’d look in and have a few words with you this afternoon.’

Joel said nothing, and Anne went back to the hall, and, calling Dinah, set her to do her daily task of sewing.

Churchwarden Hargreaves was a grocer ;

that is to say, he called himself a grocer, though in his little shop in Sleepy Dale he sold most things, from bread to blacking ; but he was essentially a grocer in this, that he had a grocer's mind. There are some minds that, could they be resolved into concrete form, would appear with short side-whiskers and a white apron ; and such a mind was Churchwarden Hargreaves'. He was a good man—in intention ; but commercial—even in his religion. He spoke much of free grace, but the still, small voice of the grocer mind told him that for every ounce of grace the Almighty would require an ounce of service full measure ; and while he was anxious that the Holy Spirit should dwell in his heart, he could not altogether repress a lurking conviction that he, in return, was entitled to a place in the mansions of the blest. Anne Hatherden esteemed him as being a devout Christian ; Joel respected and disliked him.

He arrived soon after four o'clock, and, at Anne's invitation, stayed to tea.

'I met Mrs. Latimer, as she calls herself, on my way here,' he observed between two mouthfuls of bread and butter.

'She came here to ask how Joel was,' said Anne, 'but that was more than an hour ago. I should have thought she'd have gone home before now.'

'She walks about the best part of the day, I think. It's very unusual—in a woman; I can't but think there's something at the bottom of it.'

'I don't see there can be much harm in walking,' put in Joel. 'Legs were given us to use, I take it.'

'To use, yes, but not to overdo it. Use and abuse, as the saying is, and offences often come from what was given for our good.'

'Joel feels sort of grateful to her,' said Aunt Anne apologetically. 'She came here to fetch help to him the night he

had the accident, and he thinks a deal of her doing it; he's like that, is Joel.'

'I don't say but what she can do a kind action,' said the churchwarden, 'nor but what she's tractable and open to advice; but that's neither here nor there; the children of this world are often pleasanter to deal with than the children of light. What I feel is, there's something deceiving about her; that name in the book, now—I can't get over that.'

'She might have a good reason for hiding her name,' said Joel—'a reason, I mean, that had nothing bad in it.'

'A lie's a lie,' said Aunt Anne, 'whatever reason you have for telling it, and good and evil don't stay long together. Those that lie wouldn't stop short at other things.'

'Well, the lie's not proved,' said Joel; 'and there doesn't seem to me much ground to go upon.'

'A deal too much,' observed Mr.

Hargreaves with a shake of the head, 'and the matter weighs upon me; I fear the woman may be a bad influence in the parish. To be sure, I have warned the people not to hold much intercourse with her, and I have brought the case before the rector; but still——' and he shook his head again.

'What did the rector say?' asked Joel.

'Well, he's an old man, you see, the rector, and past being a very active labourer, and he didn't seem inclined to move in the matter. So, the evidence being, as you say, not much to take hold of, I don't see we can do anything for the present but watch.'

'And pray,' added Joel in a low voice, 'that we enter not into temptation.'

Aunt Anne looked across the table at him.

'Yes,' she said, 'we must pray, brother, lest we be led away and get to think lightly of sin.'

Joel did not answer, but finished his tea in silence, and soon afterwards the churchwarden went away. Aunt Anne betook herself to her household duties, and Joel was left alone with his pipe and his thoughts.

CHAPTER VI.

Two days passed away ; on the third, Churchwarden Hargreaves came back from London. As he bustled along the road from Barhaven, a black bag in his hand, his thick overcoat buttoned across his chest, there was an air of important respectability about him, to which his fellow-villagers were well accustomed ; but there was also an air of excitement, of triumph, of longing to tell somebody something, which was new to Sleepy Dale.

He did not take the path that branched off up the steep green hill towards Little Hollow, but kept along the road that led round by the sea to the village. He hurried onwards, changing his bag now

and again from one hand to the other, till he was close to the beach ; then suddenly he stopped short, and stood still, looking towards the sea.

On one of the rocks that lay scattered along the shore a woman was seated, with her back towards him. Churchwarden Hargreaves watched her for a minute or two, then approached her with slackening steps. She looked round once at the sound of his feet in the shingle ; but, after a glance, turned back to her old position. The churchwarden came on and on, till he was close beside her.

‘Woman, I have something to say to you.’

The woman did not move or look at him.

‘Well ?’

‘It is a serious matter.’

‘Is it ? The last time it was that I turned to the east at the Creed. It was heathenish, you said.’

‘Idolatrous was the word I used ; and idolatrous it is—papistical and popish.’

‘Well, I have stopped that, you see. I am very willing to please you ; I don’t mind.’

There was a minute’s silence.

‘Please be quick,’ said the woman. ‘What is it ? What have I done lately to offend you ?’

‘Woman, your offence is against a higher than me.’

The woman rose.

‘I wish you would call me Mrs. Latimer,’ she said. ‘I am a woman, it is true ; but you need not tell me so every five minutes.’

‘I cannot call you Mrs. Latimer,’ said Mr. Hargreaves, with slow solemnity.

‘Why not ?’

‘It is not your name.’

‘You are still thinking of the book ?’

‘No ; but I know that the book spoke true. I have just come back from London.’

The man and the woman were facing one another now ; the man's face was full of confident accusation ; the woman's grew a shade paler. She did not answer ; but her lips parted slightly, and she said beneath her breath very softly :

‘ Ah !’

‘ You will confess now ?’

‘ Confess ? What ?’

‘ That you told a lie about your name, and that you have acted a lie ever since you came to settle here.’

‘ Yes ; I told a lie—I suppose, at least, it was a lie. I was forced into it—I did it to shield myself.’

‘ Don’t you know that the devil is the father of lies ?’

‘ Yes ; but, still—to save myself from the talk, and the wondering, and the cruelty—I believe I would always tell a lie.’

‘ Have you, then, no fear of God before your eyes ?’

‘ I don’t know. I have a horrid fear

sometimes in my heart ; but I think—it is the fear of men.'

The churchwarden shook his head slowly.

'I always feared you were on the broad road that leads to destruction.'

The woman flushed.

'You have no right to say that ; you are not my judge. I have listened to you, and borne with you, and submitted to your interference, because I would do anything for peace—anything just to be allowed to live quietly for a time, till things are forgotten, and I can go out into the world again. But you have no right to judge me—you know nothing about me ; and to take a false name when my own name is hateful to me is not a deadly sin.'

'And why is your own name hateful to you ?'

'Why ? Oh, you should know, as you know, you say, all about me ! But, good

reason or bad, I hate the name—I hate it, I hate it!’

The woman’s face was fierce with passion. Churchwarden Hargreaves drew back a pace or two.

‘Would you hate the name,’ he asked, ‘if it was free of guilt?’

The woman stopped short in her passion; the wild emotion died out of her face. All at once she was cold and rigid, and she spoke with quick, sharp utterance:

‘There is no guilt. I am not guilty.’

‘There was strong proof against you, Mrs. Saryll.’

‘It was circumstance, not guilt, that made it strong. And—you forget—I was acquitted! You have no right to speak to me of guilt.’

‘My nephew says that if you had been old, or a common woman, or—or unpleasing to the eye, you would not have been acquitted.’

‘Who is your nephew?’

‘He is in Crake and Quinn’s; he was well up in the case.’

The woman was silent for awhile.

‘Is that what you had to say to me?’ she asked at last.

‘Yes; part of it.’

‘You have not done, then?’

‘No. I feel it my duty—an unpleasant one, to be sure; but duty is duty, whether agreeable or disagreeable—I feel it my duty, in the name of myself and my fellow-inhabitants of this place, to request you to leave it.’

The churchwarden stood in pompous self-righteousness; he had laid down his bag beside him; both his hands were at his disposal, and he folded them across his stomach.

‘What harm do I do you all?’

There was a pleading note in the woman’s voice, a sort of mute appeal in her attitude, as she bent a little forward; but the stout man, with his hands

still folded, continued to regard her severely.

‘You are a bad influence in the parish,’ he said. ‘I have held the position of churchwarden here getting on for twenty years; and in all the time of my stewardship I have been a faithful servant, fighting the good fight, and warring against such as seek after mischief.’

‘Such as I?’

‘No; I have never had to do with a case like yours till now.’

The woman smiled bitterly.

‘Never with one so bad,’ she said.

She came a few steps forward.

‘But I do no harm; even if I were as bad as you think I am, I do no harm. I live quietly; I speak to very few people. What harm have I done?’

‘I can’t exactly say you have done harm, so far,’ answered the churchwarden slowly, ‘though your clothes do draw the eyes of the women to you in church.’

But up to now you've been a stranger, so to speak — nobody knew nothing about you ; now it's different—you would be a stumbling-block and a rock of offence.'

'I don't see why. You say yourself that, so long as I was unknown, I was harmless. Why should I not be unknown still ? The evil reputation that the charity of men has flung and holds about me would do the people harm, you say ; but the people, far away in this quiet village, are not likely to find it out. Why can I not go on living here peaceably, as I have lived for the past year ? I am neither better nor worse than I was a month ago.'

The churchwarden's folded hands were parted and raised on high.

'Woman, you amaze me ! Do you think that I would join you in a lie ?'

'I had thought—hoped you might have mercy—charity. Have you good people no pity ?'

‘I pity the deserving; but I doubt—I do not set up to be your judge; there is One will judge you on the judgment day—I doubt whether yours is a deserving case. And, besides, I should be unfaithful to my calling, if I was to encourage you in deceit.’

For half a minute the woman looked at the stolid face; then she turned away.

‘No,’ she said, ‘I see it is impossible; it is no good. But I cannot’—she half turned again—‘I cannot leave this place—just now at least. I have taken the house for another year, and I cannot afford——’

‘But you were well left; you are rich——’

She broke in quickly :

‘I am not nearly so rich as people think; I am different in many—in most ways, to what people think. My life is a very hard life; and I am all alone.’

‘It is only the evil-doers that are alone; the righteous have the Lord to fall back

upon. But I doubt you are not in a state of repentance, and that the Lord has turned away His face from you.'

The woman did not answer : she stood for a little while quite still and silent, then walked slowly away along the beach. The churchwarden watched her for a time ; but seeing that she still moved further and further away, took up his bag and went on towards Sleepy Dale. After a time the woman paused in her walking, and looked all round her, and saw that she was quite alone. She stretched out her arms towards the incoming tide.

'O you sea,' she said, 'and the sky, and the rocks, and all the things they say that God has made, will *you* not pity me? Can't you give me some sign of comfort?—some little sign to show that it won't go on like this always and always?'

The waves as she bent towards them came rolling in one after the other, gently, for the day was calm, and with unheeding

monotony ; the gray clouds overhead, as she gazed up into the sky, parted no whit to let through a space of blue. Her hands dropped by her sides, and her voice sank to a whisper.

‘ It is true, that thing that he said ; God has forsaken me.’

CHAPTER VII.

THE next morning Churchwarden Hargreaves came very early to Little Hollow. Joel Hatherden lay on his couch near the lattice window; Aunt Anne was dusting the furniture; outside in the garden Dinah, with a little wooden basket by her side, was weeding the flower-beds.

‘It seems a pity you can’t go to the lecture to-morrow, brother,’ remarked Aunt Anne as she shook her duster out into the fireplace. ‘’Tisn’t often we have a chance of hearing how the seed’s sown in foreign lands, nor a magic-lantern to show us the dark places of the earth where the heathen bide.’

‘It’s over far, Anne,’ answered Joel.

‘My foot’s weak yet, and I’m best at home.’

He glanced out into the garden.

‘Why, here’s Mr. Hargreaves ! It seems early for him to be out visiting.’

‘He’s full of brotherly kindness,’ said Aunt Anne, ‘and no doubt it’s out of neighbourliness he’s come, to see how you’re getting on.’

There was apology in her voice, but the expression of her face was doubtful ; such early visiting came perilously near to gadding about. She went to the outer door, and opened it just as Mr. Hargreaves reached the step.

‘You’re out early,’ she said, ‘early, I mean, to be away from your morning duties.’

‘Smaller duties must give way to big ones,’ answered the churchwarden, ‘and I have a big duty to perform this morning.’

He bustled into the hall.

‘Good-morning, friend. Not able to get about yet, I see?’

‘Not yet a bit.’

‘I wanted him to try to get to hear the lecture to-morrow,’ said Aunt Anne, ‘but he seems as if he hadn’t much heart for trying.’

‘It’s weakness,’ said the churchwarden; ‘the Lord will give him strength by-and-by.’

‘When did you come back from London?’ asked Joel.

‘Yesterday afternoon. I bring news from London.’

‘Good news?’

‘No, bad—very bad.’

‘I never knew much good—news or anything else—to come from London,’ remarked Aunt Anne.

The grocer sat down in the wooden armchair by the fireplace, and, bending a little forward, placed a hand on either knee.

‘The news is about the woman we took counsel over the other day,’ he said.

‘Mrs. Latimer?’ asked Anne.

‘The woman who gave out her name was Mrs. Latimer. But Latimer is not her name—as we thought.’

‘As you and I thought,’ put in Anne; ‘Joel was all for standing up for her.’

‘It’s a terrible business,’ the churchwarden went on. ‘I haven’t told nobody about it yet: I came to you first, as being old friends and long-established Christians.’

‘What has the woman done?’

It was Joel who spoke, and then for a long time he did not speak again: he lay on his couch, his face half turned away, and listened while the churchwarden told the story of his visit to London, and how he had discovered the truth about Mrs. Latimer.

‘It’s a terrible responsibility,’ said Mr. Hargreaves when he had come to the end

of his tale, 'a terrible responsibility how to act.'

'You must lay the matter before the Lord,' said Aunt Anne.

'I done so,' returned the churchwarden, 'I done so; but I don't seem to see the course of action.'

'I don't see,' said Joel with his slow utterance, 'I don't see that action's necessary.'

'Not necessary? Why, what would you do then?'

'Nothing.'

'Nothing? My dear friend, you can't mean that you would let that woman go on living here, the same as if she was like you or me, with no past to hide away under false names?'

'So long as she—behaved herself in the present, I—think I say yes to that.'

A dead silence followed this speech. Joel's face flushed, but presently he raised himself on his couch and went on speaking.

‘ ’Tisn’t as if she’d been guilty,’ he said ; ‘ they found her innocent ; and it seems to me, we’ve no call to judge her—more particularly when the law was in her favour.’

‘ The law don’t go for guilt,’ said the churchwarden ; ‘ evidence—it’s evidence it goes for. That’s what my nephew, Thomas, said to me. “ It’s all a question of evidence,” he says ; “ and the evidence was insufficient ”—that was the word he used—“ insufficient.” “ But,” says he, “ the public was against her from the first ; and, to my way of thinking, the public was right.” ’

‘ I know nothing about such things,’ said Aunt Anne ; ‘ but if she did it, they had no right to let her off—evidence or no evidence.’

‘ She was well known—my nephew said they was well-known people ; and the case made a great stir. I don’t know whether that had anything to do with it ; but, anyhow, they said there wasn’t sufficient evidence, and they let her off.’

‘The lie goes against her,’ said Aunt Anne; ‘if she’d kept to her own name, I’d have been better inclined to believe in her.’

‘Just so,’ said the churchwarden; ‘but, without going so far as to say whether she did it or not, I don’t seem to make it easy with my conscience to let her go on living here unbeknown to those about her. It seems like joining in with her.’

‘She might go away,’ said Joel. ‘The best way would be to put it to her, as you’re bent on following it up.’

‘She won’t go away; that’s where I blame her. She says she’s taken the house for another year, and she can’t afford to give it up. Yet she’s a rich woman, my nephew says, or ought to be: they was wealthy people, and she was comfortably provided for. It’s strange altogether; I don’t make it out.’

‘Those that lie about one thing will lie about another,’ said Aunt Anne: ‘there’s no making out where there’s deceit.’

‘That’s what I feel, and that’s what makes the danger. I can’t but see it a duty to let the people know.’

‘It’s not very difficult, anyhow,’ said Aunt Anne. ‘Tell one, tell all; ill news spreads fast.’

‘That’s true; but it seems a gossipy kind of way. I hold it ought to be done more—more solemn-like. There’s this lecture to-morrow night, now; I generally say a few words after a lecture, and I might—I’ve been thinking—I might, perhaps, bring it in.’

‘But if she’s there?’ Joel said quickly, in a low voice.

‘I have warned her; I told her I should feel it a duty to make the matter public.’

‘I can’t think she’d care to go,’ said Aunt Anne, ‘now she knows her deceit’s found out.’

‘Maybe not,’ said the churchwarden, ‘unless she’s hardened; she had a hardened

kind of way about her when I spoke to her yesterday.'

Then he rose to go.

'I'm a busy man to-day. What with the rector being laid up again, and this lecture to-morrow, there's a deal in the parish I have to keep my eye on.'

Joel did not open his book again when the visitor had gone; he lay for some time, idle and silent, looking out into the garden. At last he called to his sister.

'Anne,' he said, 'do you mind getting me the big oak stick that belonged to father? and—and my hat, if it's not troubling you?'

'Your hat? Surely you're not thinking of going out, brother?'

'I'm going to try and get about the garden a bit. I shall go to the lecture to-morrow, after all.'

'You're too changeable, brother,' said Aunt Anne, bringing the hat and stick from the little outer hall. 'This morning

you were all for biding quiet, and now you turn round and say you're able to walk as far as the village. It seems flighty; not firm-minded, as a Christian ought to be.'

Joel did not answer, but took up the oak stick and hobbled out into the garden.

CHAPTER VIII.

IT was the evening of the lecture. Already, at six o'clock, the village people were taking their way towards the school-house: the lecture did not begin till seven, but they liked to be in good time in Sleepy Dale. Outside the building little knots of men and women stood chatting for a few minutes before going in. The twilight was nearly over; it had been early to-night, and short, for there were rain-clouds overhead.

The conversations did not last long; it was chilly standing still in the damp evening air, and a cold wind came by in gusts every now and again from the sea; it was better to go inside and secure a good place,

and enjoy the brightness resulting from oil-lamps and whitewash. Some of the lamps produced smells as well as light ; but noses were not squeamish in Sleepy Dale, and it was pleasant to talk in whispers, to remark how Mrs. This was sure to be late, and Mrs. That was always the one to get to the front, and what a way Mrs. Somebody Else would be in when she came and found she'd have to sit back by the door ; and to interchange various domestic confidences, all of which acquired a mysterious charm from the fact that they were imparted under the breath.

The time passed quickly ; it was nearly seven o'clock now, and the people began to glance round towards the door, and to give false alarms of the approach of the 'missionary gentleman.' Just before the clock struck, Anne Hatherden entered, followed by her brother. Joel leaned heavily on the oak stick, and walked with

difficulty; he was pale with the exertion of coming so far, and there was a troubled look on his face.

‘There’s places there for’ard kep’ for you, Miss Hatherden,’ came in hoarse whispers from various benches near at hand; and Anne moved on along the narrow passage down the centre of the room.

Joel looked round before he followed her. The seats were all filled; there was not a vacant space, for the whole village had come out to hear about the heathen; and half-way down the room, near the wall, was the woman known as Mrs. Latimer. Joel saw her at once, and then he moved slowly forward and sat down beside his sister. A minute later the missionary entered, escorted by Churchwarden Smithers—a little mild old man, with gray hair standing up on end—and Churchwarden Hargreaves, in a high white collar and a black tie. The three mounted the

tiny platform at the end of the room, and then the lecture began.

The lecturer spoke well and simply ; for an hour he kept his audience interested ; and he illustrated his words by the aid of a magic-lantern, which was the extreme of dissipation ever dreamed of in Sleepy Dale.

The lecture was followed by a prayer, and a hymn, and a collection ; and then, after a little nudging from his fellow-churchwarden, Churchwarden Smithers got up and said that his brother the chairman wished to say—that was, he hoped he would say—that was, he begged to propose that the chairman should say a few words. He wiped his brow with his handkerchief, and sat down.

Churchwarden Hargreaves cleared his throat, and rose to his feet, and cleared his throat again.

‘ Dear friends,’ he began, ‘ I rise to thank our kind friend from abroad here

for what we have, through his agency, this evening received.'

He then proceeded to tell his audience how much they had enjoyed themselves, how thankful they ought to be for the Gospel blessings which had soothed them in their cradles and been poured upon them all their lives, and how they should not despise the heathen outcasts, but should do their best to bring the poor blacks—black in face and black in heart—into a state of grace.

The people had a great respect for the churchwarden grocer, and they listened with attentive stolidity; but they knew fairly well what he would say and how he would say it; and the buzz of applause that passed through the room when he ceased to speak, betokened hardly so much approbation as relief that the few words were over. But the churchwarden did not sit down. He waited till the audience was quiet again, and he moved a step forward.

‘Friends,’ he said, ‘I have not done.’

He stood near the front of the platform, a stout man, past middle age, his broad, sallow face more pompously solemn than usual, his whole bearing full of importance and prosperity. He glanced over the crowd of people below him; for one moment his eyes rested on a woman dressed in black, whose eyes met his with a look that was at once appealing and defiant. She made a slight movement, this woman, as if about to rise; then she sat quite still again, and drew her shawl about her with a quick gesture, as though she sought protection; the lines of her mouth lengthened, and made her face look hard and old.

Throughout the room was a strange hush; a sense of expectation made hearts beat faster, and seemed to fill the air; the people felt instinctively that something unusual was about to happen.

‘Friends, I have not done. Brothers

and sisters, fellow-inhabitants of this parish, I have a solemn duty before me. For many years now I have held the position of churchwarden, and all that time, year in and year out, I've strove to do my duty. I've laboured in the vineyard, brethren, and bore the burden and heat of the day, battling against the devil and the devil's works, and doing my utmost endeavour to shut out worldliness and sin from the parish. But the devil's cunning—wonderful cunning; and when he's found the door of the sheepfold shut and guarded, he's took and crept in by another way. Friends, there is sin amongst you—bad, black sin.'

The speaker paused for a moment, and a slight movement went all through the room. One or two men, to whom the devil meant extra glasses of beer, shuffled uneasily in their seats; and two youths near the door, who had played marbles on the previous Sunday, made a sudden and

speedy exit. The woman with the shawl wrapped tightly round her never stirred.

‘The tree is known by its fruits,’ continued the churchwarden. “‘Can men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?’” Can a lie come out of a clean heart, or deceit go with innocence? I say No, brothers and sisters’ — the speaker struck the clenched fist of his right hand against the open palm of his left—‘I say No. Now, there’s one come amongst us has deceived us from the very first; she come with a lie in her mouth, and a lie wrote upon her outside, so to speak; she come with a false name.’

Again there was a movement in the room, as heads turned and swift glances shot towards the only one in the audience who had not been born and bred in the parish. Still the woman did not stir; her eyes still looked steadily towards the platform.

‘Now, when a person tells a lie, brethren,

a person generally has something to hide ; and false names don't come to be used, excepting real names is shameful. I was in London the beginning of the week, brethren, and I heard bad news there. 'Tisn't agreeable, 'tisn't a pleasant task to tell you that news, yet I feel it a duty to let you know it ; I should feel as if I was a party to deceiving you, if I was to keep it back. I have took counsel with friends, and I have made the matter a matter of prayer, and I feel it my duty, as one well known in the parish—I feel it my duty to tell you, that the woman who come among you more than a year ago, that her name is not the name she give it out to be, but a name she is afraid to own to. Brethren ' — again for an instant the churchwarden paused, and in the pause was a sound of quickened breathing—'brethren, her right name is a terrible name—a name like the name of Cain ; it has the stain of murder on it.'

Then all at once the hush in the room was broken, and a sound like a moan broke from the listening people. On the platform the lecturer half rose, and touched the churchwarden's arm.

‘Is it a fit occasion?’ he murmured; ‘is it right——’

‘Man, it is right. I do my duty.’

Churchwarden Smithers said nothing, but pointed towards the audience.

In the audience there was a great stir, for the woman in black had risen from her seat, and was edging her way between the rows of chairs to the narrow aisle in the centre. When she reached it she walked quickly to the front of the room, and stood in the little free space before the platform, her back towards her accuser, her face towards the people.

‘It is not true. There is no stain upon my name.’

The room was full of murmurs, some of pity, more of distrust and horror. The

woman had never been popular in the village ; she was too unlike themselves to be sympathetic to the inhabitants, and there had always been a certain mystery about her. As she stood there before them all, the general feeling was one of condemnation.

Churchwarden Hargreaves bent over the low platform towards her.

‘ Woman, it is my duty to tell the people what I heard in London ; afterwards you can strive to right yourself.’

‘ Do your duty.’

The woman bent her head and stood without moving, while the man on the platform above her told her story. Now and again a quiver ran through her form, and once a sort of sob broke from her lips ; but she did not raise her head till the churchwarden had ceased to speak.

‘ Friends, the husband of this woman come to a violent end ; murder or accident it was, and the law had to come in and

decide which. There was many reasons against its being accident, and evidence was given to show as how it couldn't have happened so. The only other way was murder, and the only person could have killed him was his wife. My nephew in the law says that circumstances was strong, and many a one had made up their minds she'd be brought in guilty. But the evidence was insufficient—the law goes all by evidence, my nephew says—the evidence was insufficient, and she was let off. Brothers and sisters, I don't say she's guilty—I don't set up to judge her: “*Vengeance is Mine, saith the Lord, and judgment belongeth unto Me.*” 'Tisn't my duty to judge her; my duty is to tell you what I've heard, and that duty I've done. But how I put it to you is this: the woman come among you in a deceiving way, and I'm one that holds that deceit looks bad. Innocent she may be, but lies are of the devil, and those that tell them

aren't the kind we wish to have here amongst us, for our children to grow up alongside of. I hold the woman ought to leave us, wishing her no harm, but because I've always took a pride in the village, and strove hard against the devil laying his foundations amongst you. Avoid all appearance of evil, saith the Scripture, and though I don't set up to judge her, I can't but hold appearances are against her. Friends, I have done; I have told you what I felt driven to tell you; the burden is took off my mind; and I can sit down and feel I've done my duty.'

Then the woman raised her head; her face was quite white; her eyes had an eager, appealing look.

'You have heard my story, you have heard that I have been charged with the murder of my husband. I am innocent; no one has any right to doubt that I am innocent. You ought to know it, you ought to know that when they could not

find enough evidence to send me for trial, that when the coroner's jury let me go free again, that I must be innocent. I know there were things against me—little things that I had never thought of or heeded, till they were brought up and put as evidence against me ; but it might happen to anyone—it might happen to any of you sitting here before me ; it does not make one guilty that there are things like that against you—it only makes it possible that they might say you were guilty, and condemn you, and kill you, for all that you could do or say. I saw it all so near me—if I had been guilty I think I would have been punished enough—I saw it all when I was left there alone in the dark at night. You do not know—you have never been near it like me—you do not know what a dreadful thing it is to feel quite helpless, and to know that you may be taken out and killed, and that nothing—nothing can save you.'

The woman's eyes were full of terror ; her breast heaved as she spoke ; there was a frightened sound in her voice.

‘ I have been told,’ she went on, ‘ that criminals do not know, do not understand, that they are deadened, stupefied and do not feel the terror of it. Oh, if anybody tells you that, do not believe them ; it is not true, I know it is not true ; I have been through it, and I know.’

The woman's head drooped a little ; for a moment she let the lids fall over her frightened eyes ; then she drew herself up and went on again.

‘ But I was saved—almost at the last, and I was free again. Can't you believe that I am innocent ? When the law believed it, can't you believe it too ? Can't you let me go on living amongst you ? I have never done you any harm, I have never interfered with you, I only want to stay here quietly till people forget. And if you send me away, where can I go ?

Wherever I go, they will find it out—that I am a woman who was thought to have killed her husband ; and if I take another name, they will find that out too, and say that I lied. I did not mean it for a lie, not to deceive you in any harmful way, only just to save myself from the gossip and the wonder. Let me stay ; I am innocent, and afraid to go out into the world again and seek a fresh place ; let me stay !’

As the woman ceased to speak, she stretched out her arms in the same way as she had stretched them out when she had asked for pity from the sea and the sky ; and as the sky and the sea had given no answer back, so the people sat in speechless doubt and wavering. There was a stir through the room and muttered whisperings ; but the sympathy that had awaked at the woman’s cry for pity was checked by the horror of the crime that shadowed her ; and on the platform above stood

Churchwarden Hargreaves, his broad face grave with condemnation. He raised his hand and was about to speak, when at last, amongst the audience, a voice was lifted above the whispering of its fellows.

‘Before anything more’s decided, churchwarden, there’s something I want to say.’

A man had risen in his place and came now down the aisle towards the platform : he walked slowly, for he was lame, and he leaned heavily on an oak stick. He took his way to where the woman still waited ; he stood beside her and passed his hand nervously over his face.

‘Friends, I believe in this woman ; I believe she’s innocent, and I mean to stand by her.’

In her seat Anne Hatherden was leaning forward, and there was a strange, hard look on her face.

‘I mean to stand by her,’ Joel repeated, ‘if—if she will let me ; but anyhow it’ll show her and you I trust her, and—and it

is the only way I can make you sure I mean it. I'm not a gentleman born, and she's a lady; but being all alone makes it seem different; and a home and protection and a name she needn't fear to own to, that I can give her. So to show you truly that I believe in her and trust her and mean to stand by her, I ask her, here, now, before you all, to be my wife.'

The hesitation had gone from his manner and his speech; his voice was firm and clear as he ended, and he looked with unshrinking gaze at the faces before him; through all his speech he had never looked at the woman by his side. But the woman had turned towards him when first he took his place beside her: now, with a sudden, involuntary movement, she raised one of her hands and laid it on the hand that held the oak stick. Then Joel turned and looked at her, and he saw that her eyes, so bright and wild before, were filled with tears.

A confused sound of voices filled the air;

the people rose from their seats, swayed by a common feeling of wonder that was almost dismay; but no man spoke to his neighbour, and after the first inarticulate burst of feeling came a breathless silence. Then, in the midst of the silence, a woman's voice rose, strong with command and piteous with entreaty.

‘ Brother, come back !’

Anne Hatherden's tall figure pushed its way forward to the place where Joel stood; she put a hand on his shoulder; her face was quivering with intensity of emotion.

‘ Come back !’ she said; ‘ the devil has laid a snare for you; he has sent this woman to tempt you with her face and her wickedness. It is your soul he seeks—if you yield you risk your soul. Come with me, brother, in the Lord's name come with me; come with me and save your soul !’

Joel answered her :

‘ I cannot come. Here is my wife, if she will take me for her husband.’

For a moment Anne looked at him, at the gentle face that was gentle still, but strong with the strength of absolute resolve ; she threw back her head, and, gazing upwards, uttered a low cry that was full of pain ; then she covered her stern face with her hands, and went through the crowd of people out into the heavy night outside.

Churchwarden Hargreaves followed her, and after a minute's pause the other two men left the platform and took their way towards the door. For a little while the people hesitated, looking with awkward, bewildered glances into each other's faces ; then, slowly and quietly, they streamed out of the building. At last they were all gone, and Joel and the woman were left alone.

CHAPTER IX.

FOR a space the man and the woman stood silently side by side. Through the open door came the sound of voices and the tramping noise of many feet; but soon the voices grew faint, and the footsteps died away, and the low cry of the wind sweeping inland from the sea was all that broke the stillness. Then the woman spoke in a broken voice.

‘Why did you do it?’

Joel did not answer. The courage that had given him strength to defy the opinion of his fellows and the far more terrible wrath of his sister, seemed to die away again when he was left alone with the woman for whose sake he had been brave,

and he became once more timid and hesitating. The woman spoke again.

‘Did you mean it?’ she asked, ‘or did you do it just to save me awhile from the curious eyes and the condemnation?’

‘I meant it. It came sort of suddenly to me,’ Joel went on slowly, after a pause; ‘I had no thought when I came to the meeting to-night of asking you to be my wife. I wouldn’t have dared—I know I’m different—I came because I thought there’d maybe be some—some unpleasantness, and I—I didn’t know rightly what to do; but I thought I’d try and stand by you.’

‘You are the first person,’ said the woman sadly, ‘who has dared to stand by me.’

‘I didn’t know rightly what to do,’ Joel repeated; ‘I sat there trying to think of things I could put together in a speech, but I’m no speaker, and I knew the churchwarden ’ld get the better of me.’

And, then, when I looked up and saw you standing there with your poor white, frightened face, I didn't seem to have any more thought of speechifying. You put me in mind of one of those bits of rock that stand far out from the cliffs, and never can get away from the sea, but wait there while the tide comes in, with none to help or save, till the waves come over them and swallow them up; and all I felt was a sort of feeling I wanted to save you and put you safe, where the waves couldn't get at you to do you hurt. I didn't seem to care about the people and—and Anne; I felt that if you were to be hurt, I wanted to be hurt too; and I meant to show that I put you before all the world.' Joel stopped and hesitated. 'That's—that's why I did it,' he ended awkwardly.

'You must sit down,' said the woman. 'You are tired with coming so far, and your foot is weak yet.'

She took his hand and led him to a

chair, and she sat down beside him and bent her eyes upon the ground.

‘Do you know,’ she said, speaking with subdued, measured utterance, ‘that you have tempted me sorely to-night? For a year, for more than a year, ever since that—that dreadful thing, I have been a hunted creature. Always it seemed to follow me, always; I knew that they would find it out here, because I knew that I could never escape from it; and I tried to fall in with their ways, and do what they liked, and obey that man they all look up to so, so that when they knew, they might have learned to like me, and would let me live on amongst them. But it has been no good.’

‘It’s their way to distrust strangers in Sleepy Dale,’ said Joel.

‘There were some who told me I should have stayed in London,’ the woman went on; ‘but I—I cannot tell you—but I could not stay in London, nor go abroad, nor—anywhere very far.’

Her voice had risen, and was trembling; she checked herself, and spoke on in her former quiet way :

‘ I had passed here, through this country, once or twice long ago, and I had always remembered it ; and I thought that if I could get shut in amongst the hills, I should be freer and more at peace. But it followed me even here ; and the loneliness—I have never liked to be much alone ; and sometimes I thought—only there were reasons—— But the twilight is the worst ; that was why I always went out then—like that evening when I spoke to you. I came out to-night, and walked about till it was nearly dark. I did not mean to come here ; but I had promised my servant she should come, and I knew the house would be empty to go back to, and I longed for people, and light, and the sound of voices ; and I came—I could not but come.’

‘ I am glad you came,’ Joel said, as she paused.

‘I came, and then I knew that I had come where the storm would burst upon me ; and I knew that these people here would look at me with the same look as the people did in London. And then, when it came, I could not sit there in the midst of them ; I knew all their eyes were upon me, and it seemed better to stand up and face them, and see their judgment with my eyes rather than feel it with my heart. And so I went and stood out there before them ; and at the last, when they knew it all, I looked up and met the look that I knew would be there—the look that means : We do not believe you ; we think you ought to die.’

‘It’s gone by,’ said Joel ; ‘there’s no need to think about it ; and I don’t fancy there’s so many against you as you think.’

The woman went on as though she had not heard him.

‘I know the look so well,’ she said ; ‘I have seen it so often. Even the trees have

it sometimes, and the waves of the sea, and flowers that I have plucked and thrown away again, because they seemed to say I ought to die.'

She paused just long enough to sigh.

'Then *you* came and stood beside me, as I was all alone.'

Suddenly the low-toned voice was raised, and the words came eagerly :

'You said I seemed to you like one of those rocks that the sea breaks over and swallows up. But rocks are dead, cold things that do not feel, and I was a living woman in the sea. You know—you must have heard—that drowning people cling to those who try to save them, and drag them down to death ; you must have heard it ; and that it is not out of malice to the saviour, but in the madness, and the selfishness, and the longing for life, they cling and cling, and drown the rescuer with themselves. So, when you came, I clung to you ; so, as you still keep near to

me in my wretchedness, I would cling to you still. You tempt me—you tempt me sorely with your hope of shelter; and I am selfish, and I am in despair.’

‘Then take the shelter; it will last as long as I live.’

‘But if I drag you down? If, while you try to save me, you lose yourself? I am selfish; but your life has been so peaceful, so free from horror and suffering! I would let you go—if I could, I would let you go. Leave me now while the little strength is in me, while the shadow of your greatness makes me a little great; leave me now, and let me do one good thing.’

‘I will not leave you,’ Joel said, ‘if you will take my help. I trust you—I know you are innocent; I will not leave you, if you will let me stay.’

‘You will lose your friends—you will make yourself an outcast, like me; and—it is not worth while; you had better let me go my way.’

‘Your way shall be my way. As for the people, they know me, they trust me; and when you are—my wife, they will soon forget. If not, I choose—you.’

The woman turned to him quickly.

‘Do you mean—you cannot mean—you love me?’

‘Yes—though I did not know it till I had asked you to be my wife.’

The woman rose up suddenly, and wrung her hands.

‘It is not fair,’ she said; ‘it is not fair that you should love me.’

She walked away quickly to the door, then turned.

‘Come outside,’ she said. ‘I have something to say to you; and I cannot say it in the light.’

Joel followed her; just outside the school-house she was waiting for him. She bent towards him, and spoke almost in a whisper.

‘Do you know,’ she said, ‘that I do not love you? I cling to you, because I am like those drowning people I told you of—to save myself from perishing. If you had only pitied me, I—I could have borne it better; but that you should love—it—is very hard.’

‘It is not hard. You are different from any woman I have ever seen; it is enough for me if I may love you.’

‘Is it enough? Joel Hatherden, can you take my hand, and say truly it is enough?’

Joel stretched out his hand, and in the darkness found a hand that trembled.

‘What is your name?’ he said.

‘My name is Lucy.’

‘Lucy, I take your hand, and I will stand by you and trust you as long as I am alive. I love you, and for me that is enough.’

The woman stood silent for a little while; then she said:

‘ Let us walk on. It is hard for you to walk ; I will come with you, and help you home.’

‘ No ; you must not come. I can go—it is too far.’

The woman had moved into the space of light that came through the door of the school-house, and it seemed to Joel that she smiled as she had smiled that first night when he had met her on the hill.

‘ For this once,’ she said, ‘ I must have my way. Afterwards, it shall be as you wish.’

So they walked together, the man and the woman, two dark figures in the darkness of the night, side by side through the village, and across the silent fields, and into the sheltered peace of Little Hollow. Around them the hills rose up like denser, climbing pieces of the night ; behind them, through the valley that wound towards the shore, the wind came like a great sigh from the sea, and followed them. All the

length of the way they did not speak ; but when they had reached the garden-gate, the woman, standing with bowed head before Joel, said a few trembling words :

‘ I take your love, and I take your life ; I put you like a shield between my past and me. If I should be a curse to you, yet may God bless you !’

She walked away very quickly back towards the fields ; and Joel Hatherden stood alone, and wondered at the new life that had begun.

CHAPTER X.

THE mournful night had become less sad ; the heavy clouds had yielded to the wind, and moved on apace, leaving rifts where bright stars twinkled. In the branches of the tree that sheltered Joel as he stood, the breeze, passing by, made a little moaning sound ; it roused him from his dreaming, and he went slowly into the house.

The house was very still, and all the lights were out. Joel crept upstairs in the darkness, passing on beyond his own room, up the little flight of stairs that led to the top of the house. On the landing he stopped and listened ; all was still. Anne Hatherden, pleading before the Lord, was pleading in an agony that was silent in its

intensity ; she made no sound and heard no sound as she knelt by the bedside on the uncarpeted floor.

Joel waited a minute, then softly turned the handle of Dinah's door and entered the room. He groped his way to the table where the candle stood, lighted it, and, shading the flame with his hand, moved gently to the bedside and looked down at the sleeping child. After a time she stirred, opened her eyes, and started up ; then, seeing her father, sank back again and smiled.

‘Oh, father,’ she said, ‘I have been dreaming of the Queen of Sheba.’

‘The Queen of Sheba?’

‘Yes, the beautiful lady that came the night you hurt your foot ; I call her the Queen of Sheba. I wish she would come again.’

‘If she came—if she came for always—to be your—to live with you, would you love her, Dinah?’

‘Yes, always, father.’

Suddenly the child raised herself in the bed, put her arms round her father’s neck, and whispered in his ear.

‘Father, I have said it in a prayer; I shall love her always.’

Then the shy reserve which had become her second nature crept over her again, and she crouched down under the bedclothes, looking up with timid eyes. Joel Hatherden stooped over her and kissed her.

‘Dinah,’ he said presently, ‘I am going to put out the candle. You must go to sleep again; I shall stay here and watch beside you.’

‘In the dark, father?’

‘Yes, I don’t mind the dark.’

So Joel sat by the little bed, and Dinah, soothed by the knowledge of his presence, soon fell asleep. The window was uncurtained, and Joel could see the sky and the stars that showed themselves between the clouds. He thought of the evening

when he had climbed the steep green hill, and seen a woman's figure standing at the top, motionless against the darkening sky ; and how in the horizon the day had lingered in pale bars of light ; and how beyond the woman a faint star, stealing forth alone, had seemed to crown her as she stood. He sat and thought till the daylight broke ; and in the room a few yards away Anne Hatherden still pleaded for his soul.

So through the night love and anguish watched side by side at Little Hollow.

On the seashore Lucy Saryll wandered slowly till the darkness passed and the day awoke. She said to herself :

‘I can hear the cruel waves break now, because I have found a refuge.’

When the dawn broke, the tide was coming in, and in the midst of the gray waters she could see a dark rock standing all alone ; the waves dashed against it, then over it, and at last it was hidden in the sea. -

Joel had said: 'You put me in mind of one of those rocks that stand far out from the cliffs and never can get away, but wait there, with none to help or save, till the waves come over them and swallow them.' She remembered his words as she stood in the brightening light and said that she was saved; then they passed out of her thoughts and were forgotten. But after many years there came a time when she remembered them once more.

Book II.

DINAH.

All a man hath, that will he give for life.

ROBERT BROWNING.

CHAPTER I.

TEN years passed by.

On a soft spring morning a girl sat reading in the garden of Little Hollow. A great bunch of primroses lay on her lap, and in the wide flower-bed by the path sweet-scented flowers of the spring sent forth a generous fragrance. Every now and again the girl looked up from her book, and let her eyes rest on the long green hill beyond the garden wall, and at last she ceased her reading, and leaned back in her seat, and seemed to dream.

‘Dinah!’

The girl started and looked round.

‘Yes, mother. What is it?’

Just outside the house a woman was

standing ; her face was shaded by a broad-brimmed hat, and she drew on a pair of gloves as she stood. Dinah rose and went towards her.

‘ I am going to walk up the hill to meet your father,’ said the woman. ‘ Will you come ?’

‘ Yes, I should like to come. I will just leave my book in the house ; and these primroses—I think I had better put them in water. Do you mind waiting a minute ? or, if you will go on, I can overtake you.’

‘ I will wait ; there is no great hurry.’

Dinah went into the house, and Lucy Hatherden strolled down to the gate and stood leaning against it. She had not changed much in the ten years that had passed since she had come to live at Little Hollow ; she seemed rather younger than older than she had seemed that night when she had stood at bay before the village people, and begged to be allowed to live on amongst them ; for the haggard look

had gone from her face, and the terror had faded from her eyes. She had almost forgotten that evening now; the long quiet years seemed to hang like a curtain between her and it; and it was not often that the curtain was drawn aside and the past looked forth once more. And in the village the memory of that evening had faded too. Many were dead who had looked at her doubtingly then; many who were men and women now had been mere children then, and the people had grown used to her presence; the wife of Joel Hatherden did not seem to be the same woman who had come amongst them with ways and looks and speech so different from theirs. She was different still; she never could be a neighbour to them, or like one of themselves; but they were willing to ascribe the difference to the fact of her being 'a lady born'; and in the hard winters, or when work was scarce, she was ready to play the part of Lady Bountiful with un-

grudging hand. Even Churchwarden Hargreaves had ceased to warn the people against her ; and the rector, an old man, living all alone, was pleased to have her companionship, and had always been her friend.

Dinah came hurrying out of the house.

‘ Have I been long ? ’

‘ No, not very ; and we have plenty of time.’

The woman and the girl passed out through the garden gate, and went slowly along the straight, steep road up the side of the hill. All the valley lay in shadow, and the hush of evening rested on the stretching fields and the grassy slopes. The sun was shut out early from the dip behind the hill, and cast slanting rays on the town of Barhaven and on the sea beyond, long after it had ceased to shine on Little Hollow.

‘ That gown becomes you, Dinah,’ Lucy said suddenly, breaking a silence that seemed part of the evening peace.

The girl flushed a little.

‘Does it? Aunt Anne said it had a worldly look.’

Lucy smiled.

‘Then you may be sure you look well in it. But you had better not wear it when you go to see her again; wear the old one—the brown one, that makes you look as if you had no waist.’

‘I dare say it would please her better.’

‘I am sure it would, and it is just as well to please her—if we can.’

‘Yes, I would always please her if I could.’

‘I know you would; you are a good child, Dinah.’

‘No, I’m not. It’s quite true what Aunt Anne says; I like the world.’

Lucy Hatherden looked at the girl, half sadly, yet with laughter in her eyes.

‘The world? What do you mean by the world?’

They had reached the summit of the

hill, and before them a great glory of red and gold lay over the sky and sea. Dinah waved her hand towards it.

‘That’—she turned and pointed towards Little Hollow—‘and that, and all the places I live in and am used to. I don’t want to die—I want to live; I don’t want golden streets—I like the green fields and the hills that I know. And I like to wear gowns that I look well in; and I like to think in the morning that there are long hours to feel alive and be happy before the night comes again. I like the world.’

‘I liked the world, too,’ said Lucy, ‘when I was seventeen; but it was not a world like yours.’

‘Is there more than one world?’

‘Yes—several. Keep in your own world, Dinah, if you can.’

‘Is the world your son lives in a different one to this one, do you think?’

‘Quite different. He has not been in my world since he was ten years old.’

‘ I have sometimes wondered ’—Dinah stopped and hesitated—‘ I have sometimes wondered why he has not come into this world here to see you.’

‘ I could not let him come.’

‘ Not let him ? Why ?’

‘ I have never told you—there was no need to tell you—till now ; and I do not care to speak of that time just after—a little while before I came here.’

‘ Was that the time when you had the trouble you spoke of once ?’

‘ Yes. At that time my husband died ; he was hampered with debts, and the estate — Jim’s estate now — was heavily mortgaged. As matters stood, Jim would have inherited only debts and burdens when he came of age ; but his grandfather—he had lived chiefly with his grandfather for several years—offered to pay the debts and clear the estate, so that Jim might be a rich man when he came of age.’

‘ That was generous of him,’ said Dinah,

‘and good. He must be a kind, good man— isn’t he, mother?’

‘He made one condition,’ Lucy went on. ‘It was generous and kind, no doubt, to pay the debts, as you say; but the condition was a hard one—it seemed hard, at least, to me. He had never liked me; he wished to bring up my son apart from and uninfluenced by me. The condition he made was that I would promise not to see Jim for the next ten years.’

‘Mother! Then he was not good and generous; he was wicked and cruel.’

‘You think so? So it seemed to me. And yet I agreed to it—partly because of the benefit to Jim, partly because of other reasons—that you need not know, but that made it seem better to me that he should be a full-grown man before he made his choice.’

‘What choice?’

‘Whether he would be my son or his grandfather’s heir. He was to have his

choice at the end of the ten years—if I accepted the condition, that is to say ; otherwise he must have made it then—at once ; and he was only fifteen.’

‘ And you don’t know whether—but at the beginning, when you agreed not to see him, what did he think and feel ? ’

‘ He was angry ; he wrote—the letters he wrote to me at that time were full of anger and of trust. But he did not know anything of the matter till it was all settled ; he had been sent abroad just after—the death ; and when he came back to England, his grandfather had fulfilled his part of the bargain. At that time I was leading a desolate, wretched life, and I did not want—I felt I could not bear to have him with me ; and then I came here, and your father asked me to be his wife, and I did not know—altogether, it seemed better that Jim should go on living with his grandfather. And so I persuaded him, telling him that it would please me better,

and that it would not be honourable, either for him or for me, to do otherwise ; I persuaded him to agree to keep the condition absolutely. And he has been a great deal abroad, and that has made it seem easier.'

'But he has written to you—he was allowed to write, then?'

'Because he insisted upon it. Yes; he has written—regularly till these last few years, when he has been travelling all over the world, as you know. Yet the letters have always come'—Lucy was speaking dreamily now, and as if more to herself than Dinah—'have always come, sooner or later; and now'—she turned to Dinah again with a sudden eagerness in her voice—'Dinah, this spring the ten years will be over, and I shall see whether he will come into my world to find me, or whether——'

She broke off with a sigh, and shook her head.

‘He is sure to come.’

‘I do not know; sometimes I hardly know whether to hope—Dinah, is that your father coming over there?’

‘Yes; it is father. Shall we run down to meet him?’

‘You may, if you like; I will wait here, I think.’

Dinah set off down the hill, and met her father where the road joined the green. They mounted the slope arm-in-arm—slowly at first; but by - and - by Joel quickened his pace, as though impatient to reach the top.

‘Well, Lucy?’

‘Well?’

In the man’s voice was a fulness of satisfaction; in the woman’s a languid graciousness.

‘Did you come to meet me, Lucy?’

‘Yes, of course. Should we climb this great hill, do you think, only to look down upon Barhaven?’

‘There was the sunset ; and you like a walk.’

‘I don’t care much for sunsets—I have seen so many ; and I have had a long walk to-day. No ; when the master of the house is away all day, by evening the house gets lonely, and so the household goes out to meet him and bring him home.’

‘He doesn’t stay away longer than he’s obliged to,’ said Joel, walking on between his wife and his daughter.

‘Oh, father ! not when the new books come ?’

‘No—except it’s to see they’re properly placed ; and that, you may say, is a necessity. No, Dinah ; home’s best.’

‘There’s no supper at the library, Dinah, you see,’ said Lucy ; ‘and even scholars get hungry sometimes.’

Joel laughed.

‘Yes ; I only come home because of the supper,’ he said. ‘Did you see Aunt

Anne to-day, Dinah ?' he asked presently.
'How's her rheumatism ?'

'Better, she said. But I don't know ;
she seemed——'

'Seemed poorly-like, did she ?'

'She talked a great deal about Satan,'
said Dinah ; 'and—I notice she always
does it if her rheumatism's bad.'

'Did you go, Lucy ?'

'No ; I stayed in the village. I had
some shopping to do, and I thought it
better, perhaps,—as she had the rheu-
matism.'

'Maybe.'

Anne Hatherden was the only person in
Sleepy Dale whom time had not softened
towards Joel's wife. To her Lucy was
still the strange woman who had been sent
by the devil to stand between her brother
and his salvation ; and though she laboured
by prayer and precept to defeat the devil's
ends, she could not but know that her old
influence over Joel was greatly weakened

by his love for the woman she distrusted and disliked ; and the knowledge filled her with bitterness. She lived in the little house near the sea in which Lucy had formerly lived, and she did not often come to Little Hollow. The years as they passed seemed to make her stern nature sterner, and her hard religion harder ; and while she sought to set her affections on heavenly things, and to work out her own salvation, her heart was sore and full of anger against the woman who had come between her and the one great human love, the one chief spiritual ambition of her life.

Joel Hatherden went often to see her ; the love and awe with which he had always regarded her were strong within him still ; and it seemed to him that his happiness could not be complete while the weight of her displeasure still rested upon it. But the weight had not been lifted

yet ; he felt it as he walked by his wife's side down the darkening slopes to Little Hollow ; and he sighed as it pressed upon him.

‘What is it, Joel ?’

‘Nothing, Lucy ; only—I wish you and Anne could be friends.’

‘We are, as far as my part of it goes. I bear no grudge ; it is she——’

‘Yes, yes ; I know. She's stiff and fixed-like in her ways, is Anne ; she doesn't change easily. Well, well ; perhaps it may come right some day.’

‘Perhaps ; though I doubt it sometimes. I doubt whether she will ever forgive me for being your wife—unless I were dying, perhaps, or dead.’

‘Don't say things like that, Lucy ; I don't like to hear them.’

‘Then I will not say them any more. See ! here we are at home !’

Lucy passed through the gateway into

the garden ; and as Joel followed her, the trouble faded from his face ; for there was always a sense of peace and rest at Little Hollow.

CHAPTER II.

A WEEK after that calm evening, Lucy Hatherden set out to walk to Barhaven : she had some shopping to do in the town, and she was to walk back with Joel in the evening. Half-way down the garden path she turned to nod and smile to Dinah, who was standing just outside the door of the house ; then she went on towards the gate, the smile still lingering on her lips. She paused before she lifted the latch, and looked at her watch.

‘ Yes, I have plenty of time,’ she said, ‘ I can go slowly ; it will be hot climbing the hill to-day.’

The sky was quite clear, and the April sun shone brilliantly on the green hillside

and the climbing track of white. It seemed very much shut off from the world, this quiet valley, Lucy thought, as she strolled along the road; there was no sound to be heard but the voices of the larks high overhead and the tinkling of sheep-bells, and no moving thing to be seen but one black speck on the road above her.

‘I never thought I could get so used to it,’ she was thinking, as she went along; ‘I never thought I could have gone on bearing the dulness of it; and now—I suppose I have got dull too.’

The black speck was growing bigger; soon it became the figure of a man, and Lucy looked at it with interest, for human beings were rare in the neighbourhood of Little Hollow. She walked slowly, and was barely a hundred yards from the garden gate when the man passed her: he was a stranger, she saw at once, and his face was commonplace and heavy. He went on a

few paces, then turned and followed her.

‘Beg pardon! Am I right for Sleepy Dale?’

‘Yes; you have but to follow this road.’

‘Is it far?’

‘About a mile. If you come from Barhaven, you have come rather out of your way; you would have done better to keep along the road by the shore.’

‘Yes; but they told me that the place I want was a bit out of the village, and that this was the nearest way. Little Hollow—can you tell me——?’

‘What do you want with Little Hollow?’

There was a sudden interest in the woman’s voice; in the man’s, as he answered, was a shade of surly impertinence.

‘That’s my business; and it’s private.’

Lucy Hatherden’s voice took on a haughtier tone.

‘It concerns me,’ she said, ‘whatever it may be. With whom is your business? I have the right to ask.’

‘With the mistress of the house.’

‘Then you need go no farther. I am Mrs. Hatherden.’

The man said nothing, but stood still and stared at her.

‘Well,’ said Lucy after a minute, her colour rising under his curious gaze; ‘what is your business with me? If you have anything to say, be kind enough to say it at once; I am in a hurry, and cannot wait.’

‘It’s no good being in a hurry; my business will take some time. If you are Mrs. Hatherden, you had better turn back.’

‘I am Mrs. Hatherden, but I do not feel disposed to turn back.’

‘You must: my business is important.’

‘State it.’

‘My name will do for the present.’

The man paused, his eyes on Lucy's face.

‘Well?’ she said; ‘your name?’

‘Martin Wace.’

The woman was looking at the man as he spoke, and she did not stir nor speak for a while : a great rush of blood crimsoned her face, and died away, and left it quite pale : for a minute it seemed to her that the larks sang very loudly, and that the light of the sun was glaring in its brilliancy. But presently she spoke.

‘How have you dared——? Why have you come?’

‘It doesn’t need much daring ; and as to why—it was necessary. Mother’s very ill ; she’s been at death’s door for the last week.’

A sudden light sprang into Lucy’s eyes ; the colour came back into her pale face ; her lips quivered as she spoke.

‘Do you think she will die?’

‘I can’t say ; she’s had a stroke, and you

never know how it may turn. But she seems to be getting on a bit now, and she's tough, is mother.'

'You think she will recover?'

'Yes, I think she will. Still, it's best to be prepared for the worst; and so I've come down to make fresh arrangements, in case she should go off suddenly.'

'I don't understand. There can be no fresh arrangements.'

'Yes, there can; you'll understand when I've explained.'

'Then——'

'Oh, not here; it will take some time, and I'm not good at hurrying! Will you come back now?'

Lucy stood for a moment hesitating; then she turned slowly and walked back towards Little Hollow; and the man followed her.

By the garden gate she paused.

'Wait here a minute,' she said.

The man hesitated, but stopped and

leaned against the gate, while Lucy went on up the drive and into the house.

Dinah was in the hall, arranging bunches of freshly-cut flowers in two brown earthenware jars : she looked up quickly as Lucy entered.

‘Mother? Have you forgotten something? or—is anything the matter?’

‘No, nothing; nothing of any importance, that is to say. It is only that somebody wants to see me—somebody from London; I met him on the road, and—it is tiresome, but I cannot go to Barhaven.’

‘Somebody from London? Who is it, mother?’

‘I don’t know exactly who it is, nor—nor what he wants. I have never seen him before.’

Lucy sat down as she spoke : Dinah left the flowers and came towards her.

‘I hope he has not brought bad news. You look—you seem as if you had heard bad news.’

‘Oh no; I do not even know what the news is yet. It is only that I am disappointed at losing my walk, and I wanted those things in Barhaven, and your father will be expecting me.’

‘Father will know that something kept you at home. Where is this—this gentleman, mother? Does he look very different from the people about here?’

‘He is waiting outside, in the garden. Dinah, I want those things very much; I think you will have to go to Barhaven instead of me.’

‘I was going to have finished the petticoat I am knitting for Aunt Anne; she was asking about it yesterday. But I can go if you want it very much; one day will not make much difference, I dare say. Only, I can finish the flowers first, can’t I?’

‘No, oh no! you must go at once, Dinah.’

There was an entreating sound in Lucy

Hatherden's voice ; but as Dinah looked at her with surprised, inquiring eyes, she rose from her chair, and tried to smile.

‘ I believe I am quite vexed and put out at having my plans upset,’ she said : ‘ it seems absurd at my age, doesn't it ? But you see I am so used to having things go just as I like ; and then it is so long since I have had anything to do with the outside world, that this stranger coming seems to have quite upset me.’

‘ Let me stay with you, then. I should like to see him.’

‘ No, no, he has probably come on business ; and besides, it is necessary that you should go to Barhaven. And I really think you had better not wait to finish the flowers, Dinah ; I am so afraid—you might miss Joel.’

‘ I cannot well miss him ; I will go to the library first, and tell him that you are not coming, and that he is to wait for me. But I will start at once ; I will go now

and put on my hat, and leave the flowers to you.'

'Yes, I will see to the flowers.'

Dinah ran upstairs, and Lucy Hatherden, standing alone in the stillness, passed her hand over her eyes. It seemed to her that the sweetness of the April afternoon had passed suddenly away, and that the peaceful solitude of her home was peopled with cruel, accusing faces. At the sound of Dinah's footsteps she turned and went quickly to meet her.

'Dinah, kiss me.'

'Mother, you are trembling. I think I will not leave you.'

'Yes, you must go; it is nothing. It was hot on the road, and the bright sunshine—it has made me a little faint. But I would rather you went: here is the list of things.'

'Very well, I will go. Oh, mother, is that the stranger coming up the path?'

'Yes. Good-bye, Dinah. Tell your father I was sorry I could not come.'

The man had nearly reached the house as Dinah went out of the door ; he paused when he saw her, and waited till she had passed by. Dinah looked at him, half shyly, half curiously, and when she had reached the garden gate, she lingered a little, looking back. She went slowly up the hill, wondering if the stranger would still be there when she returned.

Lucy Hatherden came to the door of the house and said to the man :

‘ Come in.’

He drew near slowly.

‘ Was that your step-daughter — that girl ?’

‘ That was Miss Hatherden.’

‘ She’s a good-looking girl.’

Lucy’s eyes flashed, but she said nothing. She turned back into the house, and the man followed her.

CHAPTER III.

IT was half-past five o'clock when Martin Wace came forth from the door of Little Hollow. He strolled down the path, looking about him as he went.

‘A pretty enough spot,’ he muttered, ‘but terrible dull for anyone who’s been used to much society. I’m glad it’s her and not me’s got to live here.’

He went on through the gateway, and along the road to Sleepy Dale.

In the hall Lucy Hatherden, left all alone, half lay, half sat, upon the long, wide seat opposite the fireplace ; her head was bent down upon the cushions, her hands covered her face. By-and-by she raised herself, and looked all round the

familiar room, and wondered, half consciously, why it still should look the same. She spoke in a whisper.

‘For ever,’ she said, ‘for ever and ever, as long as I live; it will never die till I die.’

She got up, and walked from window to window, turning her head from side to side, as though seeking help or refuge.

‘I am helpless,’ she said again and again, ‘I was helpless then; I am helpless now. If only I were brave, if only I did not mind—it would be better, I almost think it would be better, if it were all over. But I cannot; anything but that—anything.’

After a time she went to the door of the house, and stood just outside and looked at the solemn hills and the clover fields lying in the valley. The hillside and the fields were in shadow; the sober evening light gave a sweet sadness to the valley’s peace; only a faint pink glow above the hill told

of a brilliant sunset beyond the wall of green. Lucy stood for some time quite still, calmed by the calm around her, and with the dull blank feeling that follows upon violent emotion gradually killing her excitement. Then, after a time, her disquietude grew strong again, and she wandered about the garden, seeking for rest in movement.

At last she went back into the house and up to her bedroom. She took off the dark gown she had been wearing, and put on one of lighter texture and soft pale colouring; she unbound her hair and dressed it in a new way; she clasped a necklace round her throat, and pinned a bunch of violets at her waist. She stood before the mirror and looked at herself, at first with critical anxious eyes, and then softly smiling.

‘I have not changed very much,’ she said; ‘it is a good thing I forget so easily; time and trouble don’t make me hideous

as they make some women. I am glad ; I have something still ; there is something left to love in me still.'

She went downstairs, out of the house to the garden gate, and stood there, looking along the road. Two figures were coming down the hill ; she watched them as they drew nearer ; she recognised them a long way off, but she did not go to meet them. She waved to them when they were close at hand, and she opened the gate and stood with her hand upon it, waiting for them to pass through.

'Has he gone, mother?' asked Dinah, yet a few yards away.

'Oh yes, he has gone—some time ago!'

Joel stood by his wife and looked at her.

'Lucy,' he said, 'what makes you look different to-night?'

'It's the dress,' said Dinah. 'Mother, what a beautiful dress ! And your hair is different ; and—oh, you have never worn that necklace before !'

‘Yes, it is the dress,’ said Lucy; ‘my other dress seemed saturated with business—he came on tiresome business matters, that man that was here this afternoon—and I felt that I wanted to get rid of it all; so I took off the dress and put on this one. Do you like it, Joel?’

‘It is a beautiful dress, but—too grand, somehow, for Little Hollow.’

‘Oh no, nothing is too good for Little Hollow. You must like it, Joel; you must like me altogether to-night.’

‘I should like you, no matter how you were dressed,’ answered Joel, ‘and to-night you are like the ladies in the pictures in Mr. Redmond’s dining-room. Only you are not quite the Lucy that I know; it’s the hair maybe.’

‘Yes, it gives you a different look,’ said Dinah.

‘It is the way I used to do it long ago—before I came to Sleepy Dale. I did it so to-night to see if I had grown much

older since that time. Do I look an old woman, Joel?’

‘You don’t look old or young, mother,’ said Dinah. ‘You are still just like the Queen of Sheba, and queens are always the same.’

She went on into the house. Joel stood by the gate and looked at the half-smiling, half-pleading face of the woman before him.

‘Dinah is right,’ he said at last; ‘I’m the same as her—I don’t seem to think of whether you’re old or young; it doesn’t seem to matter. To me you’ve a different look and a different way to what any woman’s ever had before: I couldn’t say what makes it, but I know that nothing would ever take it away.’

‘Nothing, Joel? Not even disgrace?’

‘Did the fear of it—long ago?’

‘No, but then it was long ago; you might change.’

‘I’m not one to change; I’m one that

goes on in the same way; I was always so.'

'Yet you are a man, and most men change—and soon.'

'Those that change, change soon, I daresay; but those that go on, mostly go on to the end.'

'And you will go on to the end, whatever happens? Joel, I have no one but you.'

'No, and I'm afraid you're lonely sometimes. It's a dull life, quiet and dull; it's always been so, as far back as I can remember; there was never much stirring in Sleepy Dale.'

'I love it,' said Lucy, with sudden passion; 'I love the quiet life and the calm, safe days. There was a time, there have been times, when I have thought it dull, when I have fretted at the sameness of it, and longed for the stir of the world outside; but not now. I only want it to go on and on, till I am quite old, and the love

of life grows fainter, and death comes of itself. No, I do not want it to change.'

Dinah came out of the house again.

'Mother,' she said, 'you have not finished the flowers, and you promised me you would, and some of them are quite withered for want of water.'

'I'm afraid I forgot them, Dinah. I'm very sorry; you shall punish me as you think fit.'

'I don't want to punish you; and, besides, it would do no good. But I want you to tell me about the stranger from London. I was disappointed when I saw him; his face looked much the same as the faces about here, except that it was not sunburnt, and his clothes were very like the clothes Mr. Hargreaves wears on Sundays.'

Lucy laughed.

'Did you think he would look like a fairy prince, with curling locks and a velvet coat? No, Dinah, there is nothing to tell about

him ; his conversation was as commonplace as his clothes and his face.'

All the evening Lucy talked and laughed with unflagging gaiety : she was in one of the moods that came over her from time to time—moods of almost feverish animation and joyousness. But when Dinah had gone to bed, and Joel sat smoking his evening pipe, she stole away upstairs for a time, and came back with all her gaiety changed to wistfulness. She went softly to her husband, sitting by the wide fire-place, and knelt down beside him. She said :

‘The former Lucy is passed away again, and the Lucy that you know is back once more.’

She had taken off the light-coloured gown, and put on the old dark one ; her hair was arranged in the fashion of every day ; the flush had gone from her face, and the brightness from her eyes.

Joel put down his pipe, and laid one hand on her shoulder.

‘Lucy, are you in trouble?’

She started.

‘In trouble? What makes you think so?’

‘There was trouble in your face to-night when you stood yonder by the gate; there was trouble in your voice to-night, more than once. I’m not quick at noticing, but love seems to make me quick. What is it, Lucy?’

Lucy bowed her head, and said:

‘It is nothing. Only that man, coming to speak of things that had to do with the days before—before I came here, seemed to bring back some of the days with him.’

‘Only that, Lucy?’

‘Only that.’

Joel raised his hand from her shoulder to her head, and passed it gently over the plaited hair towards her neck.

‘Dear, you needn’t fear me; I’m not over apt to blame you. And if there’s

trouble, and you don't feel like telling [me what it is, then don't tell me ; I was never one for much curiosity. Only, if the trouble is there, don't hide from me that it is there ; I'd like to know, so as I might be more careful in my ways.'

The bowed head was bowed lower still, but Lucy did not speak.

'Is it there, Lucy?'

'It is there—a little ; it will pass.'

'And I cannot help you?'

'No.'

Suddenly Lucy burst into a passion of weeping, and laid her head against Joel's shoulder, and clung with her arms about his neck.

'You should not love me so,' she said ; 'you should not love me. You have given me all—the whole of you, and I can give so little.'

Joel drew a large spotted handkerchief from his pocket, and raised the hidden face, and wiped away the tears.

‘ You have given me a new world,’ he said, ‘ and I have lived in it ten years. It is enough.’

He waited a minute, then took up his pipe again.

‘ You’re tired and overwrought to-night,’ he said ; ‘ you’d best to bed. There’s something I want to read before I go, and my pipe has gone out with all the talking before I’d finished it.’

‘ Shall I leave you all alone ?’

‘ Yes, please.’

Lucy rose, kissed her husband on the forehead, and went quietly out of the room.

Joel re-lighted his pipe, fetched a book from his study, and spread it open on his knees ; but he did not read ; he only sat and thought, with his eyes on the crumbling fire, till the last red spark had died away.

CHAPTER IV.

ABOUT ten days later, Lucy received a letter with the Paris postmark on it.

‘It is from Jim,’ she said. ‘He is still travelling, then.’

She and Dinah were busy amongst the flower-beds, and she took off her thick gardening-gloves before she opened the letter. A minute later the gloves had fallen to the ground, and she cried out, trembling :

‘He is coming back to England. Oh, Dinah, he is coming back, and he is coming here !’

Dinah rose from her knees and clapped her hands.

‘Oh, I am so glad ! but I knew he

would come. Poor mother! how glad you must be!’

‘I don’t know. I am glad, I think; but I am frightened, too.’

‘Why should you be afraid?’

‘I don’t know,’ said Lucy again. ‘It is so long since I have seen him; he may not care for me.’

Dinah laughed.

‘Never fear; he must be longing and longing to see you. When is he coming?’

‘Soon—in a week or so, he says. I cannot but be afraid; it is so long ago.’

‘How long? Mother, I think that is Aunt Anne coming. May I tell her? I feel I must tell somebody, and father will not be home for hours yet.’

‘Ye—yes, I suppose you can tell her; yes.’

Anne Hatherden came slowly up the garden path; she could not walk so quickly as she had done ten years ago. The sight in her keen eyes was growing

dim, and her hair was nearly white ; but her tall figure was still upright, and her face wore the old, decided expression.

Dinah went forward to meet her.

‘ Have you come from Barhaven, Aunt Anne ?’

‘ Yes, it’s the day for the Bible meeting. Why were you not there, Dinah ?’

Dinah’s eyes grew round with consternation.

‘ So it is. I—forgot.’

‘ It was my fault,’ said Lucy, coming forward to shake hands. ‘ I ought to have reminded her ; young folks’ memories are not to be trusted.’

‘ There’s no memory, old or young, can think of everything,’ said Aunt Anne ; ‘ but there’s some as thinks of things worth thinking of, and some as fills up their minds with things of no account.’

‘ Will you sit down here ?’ asked Lucy, ‘ or would you rather go into the house ?’

‘I’d as lief be here, if Dinah will get me a shawl.’

Dinah gladly escaped into the house, and Lucy drew forward a chair.

‘Has your rheumatism been bad lately?’ she asked.

‘No, only enough to mind me I’m getting old.’

‘You’re not very old yet.’

‘Yes, I’m getting old; you needn’t cast about to pay compliments; I like to speak the truth, and to have it spoken to me. And I’m not afraid of old age; it’s what we must all come to, unless the Lord cuts us off.’

Dinah came back with a shawl, and put it round Aunt Anne’s shoulders; then she went over to Lucy, and said:

‘Have you told her?’

‘No; you can tell her.’

‘Aunt Anne,’ said Dinah, ‘mother’s son is coming home.’

Aunt Anne turned her eyes to Lucy’s face.

‘Your son?’

‘Yes,’ a quivering emotion came into Lucy’s voice; ‘I have not seen him for fifteen years.’

‘You have lived here for ten years?’

‘Yes.’

‘And for five years before that you had not seen him?’

‘No, not since he was ten years old.’ Lucy’s voice grew suddenly hard and strong. ‘His father took him away from me when he was ten years old. It was that—if it had not been for that, I should not have had such darkness in my life.’

‘Has it made your life dark, mother, all this time—all the time you have lived with us?’

‘There is no lasting darkness,’ said Aunt Anne, ‘if the Lord is on your side. The only darkness as lasts is the darkness of guilt.’

‘What do you mean by guilt?’ said Lucy quickly.

‘I mean the secret sin in the heart, that gets blacker and blacker so long as it’s hid away.’

‘Dinah,’ said Lucy, ‘I see something moving at the top of the hill ; it may be your father. Go, dear, a little way along the road and see ; he will wonder if no one comes to meet him.’

When Dinah had gone, Lucy turned to the hard-faced woman in the chair.

‘You should not say such things to me,’ she said, ‘when Dinah is by. Think of me as you will, but do not speak your thoughts before the child who has learned to love me.’

‘My words can have no power,’ said Anne, ‘if there’s no sin to answer back to them.’

‘You talk of sin,’ said Lucy. ‘Is jealousy no sin ? Is harsh judging no sin ? Is it righteous to be so sure, because you yourself are saved, that I, who have been tried as you were never tried, must be

wholly bad? But you have never ceased to distrust and dislike me, because of Joel's love for me.'

'His love!' said Aunt Anne sternly. 'Do you think I begrudge you his earthly love? No, 't isn't that; if I was never to see him again in this world, I could bear it. 'T isn't that; it's his soul I begrudge you—his soul, that I've laboured and prayed for all his life.'

'I have not harmed his soul, I do not want to harm it; I want nothing but the kind human love that pities and protects me.'

'You talk as those that know not God,' said Aunt Anne, rising to her feet; 'your understanding is darkened, and having eyes you see not. Salvation mayn't seem to you of much account now, Lucy Hatherden: it'll be a different thing when you come to be on your death-bed.'

'Perhaps.'

Anne moved away; Lucy stood still till

she had reached the gate, then, with a sudden impulse, followed her.

‘Listen,’ she said, ‘you who are so fond of truth, and I will tell you something that is true. Long ago, when I married Joel, I did not love him. You cannot blame me for this; you think nothing of what you call earthly love; you only blame me because I became his wife. I blamed myself—for many things; mostly because I married him without love, just because I was all alone. Now—lately, only quite lately, it has seemed to me that I might grow to love him in the way you despise.’

A faint blush spread itself over the younger woman’s face; the elder woman looked at her beneath bent brows.

‘There is a great power in love,’ Lucy went on; ‘some day it might happen that I might be able to show you what it is. But this, remember this, if ever I had strength to save him from any sorrow that I might bring to him, it would be for love.’

Anne Hatherden still looked at her.

‘Your ways are different to my ways,’ she said. ‘I don’t understand them, nor your speeches.’

She turned and walked away in the direction of Sleepy Dale. Lucy stood leaning against the garden gate, and looked towards Joel and Dinah coming down the hill.

CHAPTER V.

ON a fine May morning Dinah Hatherden took a basket of eggs to Aunt Anne, and when she had given the eggs into Aunt Anne's keeping, she walked on along the shore away from Sleepy Dale.

For a quarter of a mile or so the valley's mouth ran in a flat stretch of land down to the water's edge ; then the cliffs rose up again in a steep wall of white, and shut the beach in between themselves and the sea. It was a desolate shore, strewn with rocks, and covered with coarse shingle, and with only a narrow pathway of dry, dusty sand close under the shadow of the cliffs.

Dinah walked along the path for a time,

then struck down across the shingle in a slanting direction towards the sea.

‘I shall just be in time to see the waves break over the rocks at Love’s End Point,’ she thought; ‘the tide is coming in fast.’

Ahead of her, the cliffs swept out in a narrow point, and at the foot of the point a low ridge of rocks stretched seawards for some thirty yards. At low-water there was a space of soft wet sand beyond the rocks; but when the tide was full, the waves broke over them against the cliff, and the sea ran up some way past the point. The water had reached the cliff when Dinah drew near, and was rising and falling about its base. She went close to the water’s edge and watched, now the slow waves rippling to her feet, and now the fierce ones breaking on the rocks, till she was startled by a shout.

‘Ahoy!’

Just beyond the point, in the calm water

on the other side of the rocks, a man was standing up to his shoulders in the sea.

He shouted again :

‘ Ahoy !’

‘ Ahoy !’ Dinah answered back.

‘ Does it shelve much ?’ the man called.

‘ Does it get much deeper ?’

‘ Yes,’ Dinah shouted back.

The man pointed to the rocks, and moved a little towards them.

‘ No no,’ cried Dinah, waving him back ;
‘ you cannot cross them.’

The man retreated towards the shore, and was hidden behind the cliffs ; but in a minute or two he reappeared in the water, holding a boot in each hand. He called ‘ Look out !’ and threw first one boot and then the other towards the spot where Dinah stood ; then he took off his coat, rolled it up into a bundle, and sent it after the boots. The boots arrived safely on the dry shingle, but the coat fell into the sea a few paces from the shore : Dinah stepped

cautiously into the water, and drew it to land.

When she looked up again, the man seemed to have disappeared ; she saw only the line of foaming waves that showed where the rocks were hidden, and beyond, the calm glistening sea. But by-and-by she saw a round thing that seemed to float on and on till it passed the point of the rocks ; then, when it had reached quiet water, it turned and came landward again—very slowly Dinah thought ; it seemed to her impatient eyes as though it would never reach the shore. Yet it drew nearer, and she could be sure that it was the head of a swimmer ; and by-and-by the swimmer was close enough to the land to stand up in the water, and came wading ashore, and stood beside her on the beach.

‘ Do you keep many traps of that kind along this coast ? ’ he asked.

‘ Do you mean Love’s End Stretch ? ’

said Dinah. 'You should not have tried to cross it when the tide was coming in.'

'So I perceive—now; but I didn't know anything about it when I passed that point back there, where the beach narrows. It didn't strike me that I couldn't get out at this end till it was too late to turn back.'

'It is a very dangerous place,' said Dinah.

'Dangerous? I should think so. I should have been drowned to a certainty, if I hadn't been able to swim; the water-mark goes a good seven feet up the side of the cliff. That rascally innkeeper! I told him I was going to walk along the coast, and he never gave me even a hint of warning.'

'You had better not stand still, or you will catch cold,' said Dinah. 'Your boots are all right, I think, but your coat fell into the sea.'

'And you went in and fished it out; I

can tell by your boots; and—why, your dress is wet too. Why did you do it?’

‘The coat would have been lost if I hadn’t.’

‘No matter; I would much rather never have seen it again, than that you should get some horrible disease on your lungs.’

The man had been forcing his wet feet into his boots as he spoke, and he now took up the coat.

‘Good!’ he exclaimed. ‘By all that’s providential, I believe my flask’s in the pocket!’

He drew out a little silver flask, unscrewed the top, and held the flask out to Dinah.

‘You must have some.’

‘No, thank you.’

‘But you must; it will do you good.’

‘What is it?’

‘Brandy—the right thing after a wetting.’

‘No, thank you; I don’t like brandy.’

‘ But I insist upon you taking some; the responsibility of your wet feet is on my head. And look here, if you don’t take some, I won’t either, and I’m beginning to shiver like an aspen-leaf. Hark at my teeth !’

The man’s teeth had indeed begun—rather suddenly—to chatter violently; Dinah was really afraid that his wet clothes would do him serious harm, and she took the flask and drank a mouthful of the contents. The man tossed off the rest.

‘ That’s better,’ he said. ‘ And now—are we near anywhere?’

‘ The village is some way off,’ said Dinah. ‘ Aunt Anne’s is the nearest house.’

‘ Do you think Aunt Anne will let me dry my clothes?’

‘ Yes, I think so. See, there is the house—a little way back from the sea.’

‘ And what is the name of the lady who

owns it? She might be surprised if I were to address her as Aunt Anne.'

'Oh, of course—I forgot; we see so few people here who do not belong to the place. Her name is Miss Hatherden.'

'Hatherden? And she is your aunt? Then you are——'

'I am Dinah—Dinah Hatherden.'

'You are Dinah! Miss Hatherden, I am very glad that you are Dinah.'

'Why should you be glad?'

'I think I will not tell you till I have dried my clothes.'

Dinah walked on a few paces; then she stopped and said:

'Oh!'

The stranger stopped too.

'Is there anything the matter?' he asked.
'That chill—are you beginning to feel?——'

'Oh no, it is nothing. Only I was wondering if you could be——'

'Don't wonder. You will know quite enough about me quite soon enough.'

‘Then I think you must be—are you mother’s son?’

‘Yes. And you, I suppose, are father’s daughter?’

‘Yes. Oh, I am so glad!’

‘It is my turn to wonder now. I don’t see why you should be glad.’

‘Because I was beginning to think you would never come. Every morning for the last week, when I have got up, I have wondered whether you would come before the evening, and every evening I have said: “Perhaps to-morrow.” But it was beginning to seem long.’

‘Do you mean that—you *wanted* me to come?’

‘Yes, very much.’

‘I can’t think why.’

‘Because of mother principally; and then I wondered what you would be like. I have never seen anybody who has been in foreign countries—except a missionary.’

‘And what do you think of me?’

Dinah hesitated.

‘It is rather difficult to tell,’ she said presently. ‘Your face is blue with cold a—and you have got some seaweed in your hair.’

The young man muttered something under his breath; then after a moment he laughed.

‘I had forgotten,’ he said; ‘but I hope you won’t judge me by your first impressions.’

‘I will run on and tell Aunt Anne you are coming,’ was all the answer Dinah made. ‘Perhaps’—she turned and spoke in a confidential tone—‘perhaps it will be as well not to say who you are till you are dry.’

Then she ran on towards the little house a few yards away.

CHAPTER VI.

AUNT ANNE opened the door in answer to Dinah's impatient knock.

‘Dinah? What do you mean by knocking as if——’

‘Oh, Aunt Anne, that man coming there—I have brought him—he has been in the sea!’ interrupted Dinah eagerly.

‘Been in the sea? What do you mean? And why should he come here?’

‘He is so wet; and he wants—I thought you would let him dry his clothes.’

The man had reached the door now; he looked at Anne Hatherden's face and turned away.

‘I can go on to the village,’ he said, ‘if

you will be so kind as to tell me the nearest way.'

'There is only one way,' said Aunt Anne, 'and it is not a near one. You can come in.'

The man hesitated, looking from the stern face to the lonely road up the valley; he shivered slightly, and his wet clothes still dripped as they clung about him.

'Come in,' repeated Aunt Anne; and the man followed her into the house.

She led the way into the kitchen, and pointed to the fire.

'Draw near,' she said. 'I'll be back in a little.'

She went out of the room, and Dinah and the young man were left alone.

'Is your father like Aunt Anne?'

'Oh no, father is small and gentle.'

'Aunt Anne does not seem exactly gentle.'

'No, but she is very good.'

'And your father? isn't he good, too?'

Dinah shook her head.

‘He seems very good; but Aunt Anne says his soul is not safe. You see, it doesn’t matter how good you are, if your soul is not safe.’

The young man looked at her curiously.

‘No,’ he said absently, ‘I suppose not.’

‘Aunt Anne is the best person in the village,’ Dinah went on, ‘except Mr. Hargreaves.’

‘Who is Mr. Hargreaves?’

‘He’s a churchwarden; and he keeps the shop.’

‘Is there only one shop in Sleepy Dale?’

‘Yes, except Mrs. Burrell’s; and she only sells sweets and ginger-beer.’

Aunt Anne came back into the kitchen.

‘Young man,’ she said, ‘you will find some dry clothes in the room above; you’d best put them on at once. They’re old ones my cousin’s husband gave me lately to give away in the village; but you’re not

too proud, maybe, to wear cast-off clothes for awhile.'

There was a touch of bitterness in the man's voice as he answered.

'Pride and I have but little to keep us together at the best of times. I am very much obliged to you.'

'It's the open door at the top of the stairs.'

'Thank you.'

The man went out of the room and up the narrow staircase. Dinah glanced timidly at Aunt Anne.

'Are you angry, Aunt Anne?'

'No.'

Anne Hatherden came over to the fire and put on fresh fuel.

'Where did you meet this man?'

'At Love's End Point. The tide had overtaken him in the stretch, and he had to swim to save himself.'

'In the midst of life we are in death. That part of the coast's like a bit of Scripture to them as can read it.'

‘Has anybody ever been killed there?’

‘I never heard of more than one; there was a woman, an outcast, drowned there long ago, when I was a girl.’

Dinah shuddered.

‘It would be a terrible death. Do you remember it?’

‘I have reason to remember it; it was the Lord’s call to me. He spoke to me in that dead face, and my ears was opened to listen. There’s many have ears and hears not.’

Dinah sat in awed silence, while Aunt Anne moved about the kitchen. By-and-by footsteps came down the staircase, and the young man entered the room, dressed in a suit of old corduroys.

‘Sit down,’ said Aunt Anne. ‘I have made some hot coffee for you; it will do away with the harm of your wetting—though there’s not much hurt in seawater.’

‘No, I don’t think there is. But I shall

be glad of the coffee all the same; it is very good of you.'

'It's my duty according to the Bible teaching, and I don't want to know aught about you till I've done it.'

Aunt Anne poured out a cup of steaming coffee and handed it to her guest as he sat by the fireplace: then she took up her knitting and seated herself opposite to him, letting her keen eyes rest upon him from time to time, but speaking no word. When he had finished the coffee she said:

'Will you have some more?'

'No, thank you,' the man answered, 'though it is the best coffee I have ever tasted in England.'

Aunt Anne paused in her knitting, and looked across at him.

'What is your name?' she asked.

'James Raeburn Saryll.'

'You are the son of Lucy Hatherden?'

'Yes.'

‘I thought so. You have something of her look.’

‘I hardly remember my mother; I was such a little chap when they sent me away from her.’

‘It was cruel to send you away,’ said Dinah, ‘wicked and cruel. But now at last you will be together again.’

‘Dinah,’ said Aunt Anne, ‘you can go and fetch the basket you brought the butter in and take it home with you; it is in the larder.’

Dinah left the room, and Anne Hatherden went on with her knitting.

‘The child knows nothing of what happened before your mother came to Sleepy Dale,’ she said. ‘She was only seven years old when her father brought home his second wife.’

The man’s face flushed.

‘You do not like my mother.’

‘I mistrust her.’

The young man rose.

‘You have no right to say that—to me.’

‘I have the right to speak the truth—to you and all the world.’

‘You have no right——’ The man checked himself and spoke quietly. ‘Why do you distrust and dislike her? The faint memory I have of her is that she was sweet and gentle and liked by everyone.’

‘She came here with a lie upon her lips, under a false name; that’s enough for me to mistrust her: she stands, with her light ways and her worldly love, between my brother and his God; that’s why it comes hard to me not to hate her.’

‘Is your brother not happy?’

‘Happy?’ Aunt Anne laid down her knitting. ‘As the world counts happiness? What do I know or care? He worships a woman instead of the Lord, he cares for his wife and not for his soul. Is that happiness? Maybe—for a year or two.’ She rose up and rested two trembling hands on the table. ‘Oh you young man, that has

been so near death to-day ; oh all you children of this world, marrying and giving in marriage, seeking after pleasures and vanities ; with eyes that see not, and ears that hear not, and hearts that's filled with the love of this life ; do you never think of the life that is to come ? of the hell fire waiting for you on the other side of the grave ? of the Lord turning away and saying : Depart from me ? of the devil waiting to seize your souls ? I think of it, I who have strove so long to save my brother's soul and bring it to the Lord ; I think of it, sitting here alone, and knowing that yonder the days go by and his heart is hardened still ; I think of it, and the thought hides heaven from me.'

'Is God such a hard God ?—to damn a man's soul because he has pitied and loved a helpless woman ?'

Aunt Anne's eyes were dropped again ; her face that had glowed with passion was calm again ; she spoke in a quiet tone.

‘ There’s many called, but few chosen, was all she answered ; and she went to the kitchen door, and called to Dinah to come back.

CHAPTER VII.

DINAH and the young man went together through the village of Sleepy Dale, and across the sloping fields, over the hill towards Little Hollow. The wind passed gently over the uncut grass, and the air was sweet with the scent of clover; the sun was shining; and the larks were singing as they sing only in countries where no tree shades the earth or deadens the quivering notes, and there is nothing but the lark's song between the green grass and the sky.

Dinah walked lightly, with a buoyancy of motion that came from the joyful exhilaration of her mood. She was filled with delight and expectation, as her

thoughts flew on towards the woman all unconscious of the happiness that was at last so near : had she been alone she would have run singing through the fields ; as it was, her eager feet almost danced along the path.

The young man beside her walked on with scanty speech ; his footsteps seemed rather to linger than to hasten as the way grew shorter ; his face wore a look of doubt and gloom.

On the brow of the hill Dinah pointed onwards.

‘ See, there, in that nook below us, though you cannot see it yet, lies Little Hollow. There are trees all about it, and under one of the trees your mother will be sitting : she is thinking of you most likely, yet she does not dream you are so near.’

The young man turned to her and spoke abruptly.

‘ What is my mother like ?’

Dinah slackened her pace, and her face grew thoughtful.

‘Long ago, when I first saw her,’ she said, ‘I thought she was like a queen. I have never seen a queen, but still, even now, I think a queen would be like her. Let me see—I wonder if I can tell you what she is like!’ She stood still, bent her brows, and reflected a moment. ‘She is not very tall—hardly so tall as I am, and slight; yet from the way she walks, and from the way she does things, you see that she is strong. Her face is rather pale; her eyes are something the colour of your eyes, but with a different look in them—hers have a look half frightened and half brave. Her hair is fair, and—oh, I don’t know, I don’t know whether it is the way she smiles, or what it is, but there is something in her look that makes you feel as if you would want to save her if she were in danger, and would die for her if she had to die.’

A smile played on the man’s face.

‘You love my mother?’

‘Yes, father and I have always loved her.’

‘But your aunt—Miss Hatherden, she does not like her.’

‘Aunt Anne does not like anybody very much,’ answered Dinah. ‘She cares only for souls; she does not like people because they are people.’

‘And you?’

The girl cast down her eyes.

‘I have never been touched with divine grace,’ she said, ‘and that, perhaps, is why I should love people just the same, whether they were good or bad.’

‘I think I am almost glad that you are not——’ the young man said and paused.

‘Not what?’

‘Never mind; not different, in any way, from what you are.’

‘You don’t know me,’ said Dinah.

‘No, I wish I did; perhaps by-and-by I shall. But now I am going to ask you to do something for me.’

‘What is it?’

‘It’s to go on a little before me, and tell my mother I am coming. She might be startled if I appeared too suddenly—especially in these clothes.’

‘No, I should not like her to think these were your own clothes. Come in five minutes.’

Dinah sped down the hill, and the young man followed her, very slowly.

On the grass plot in front of the house, Lucy Hatherden was sitting under a tree, as Dinah had foretold. She was shelling peas, and she looked up with a smile as the girl came towards her.

‘The first peas this year, Dinah. We are going to have lamb for supper, so that your father may enjoy them in the orthodox way.’

‘Oh, mother, I have something better than peas, I have a surprise for you!’

Dinah’s face was all aglow, and her eyes were shining.

‘Dinah!’ Lucy Hatherden’s voice faltered. ‘What is it? Have you heard? Is there a letter?’

‘No, not a letter, something better, much better than a letter.’

‘Not——?’

‘Yes, himself. He is coming—I have seen him; he will be here very soon.’

‘Where, Dinah? Oh, how—what do you mean?’

Lucy put down the bowl of peas and rose to her feet.

‘I met him on the beach at Love’s End Point,’ Dinah went on breathlessly, ‘and he had to swim, and he was wet through, and they aren’t his own clothes.’

‘I don’t understand, Dinah, I don’t think——’

‘It is all right, if I had time to explain, but he will be here and—mother, look there!’

Just outside the garden gate a man was standing; one hand was on the latch, but the latch was not lifted.

‘Mother, won’t you go and meet him?’

‘I cannot.’

Lucy was pale and trembling : she sat down again and cast her eyes upon the ground. Dinah went over to the gate.

‘Come in ; go and speak to her,’ she said.

Then she waited apart, while the man went forward to the woman under the tree.

As he drew nearer and nearer, Lucy still did not move : she could see his shadow on the grass, yet she did not raise her eyes to look at him : and when he stood beside her, she made no sound or movement. The man bared his head, and knelt down, and bowed himself before her. Then a quiver ran through all her frame, and her lips trembled ; she bent her head over his head, and her hands caressed his hair.

‘Jim !’ she said, ‘my little Jim !’

The man raised his head and looked into her face.

‘Is it really you?’ she said; ‘is it the little child who went away from me so long ago?’

‘It is your son.’

‘Yes, the eyes are Jim’s eyes, and the hair grows round the brow just as the child’s hair grew. And you? have you any memory of me, Jim? or did the memory of me die as the child died?’

‘It faded—the memory of what you looked like, yet never the memory of you.’

‘You remembered me all this time?’

‘Yes.’

‘And now you have come back?’

‘Now I may be with you again.’

For a time Lucy sat, one hand upon Jim Saryll’s shoulder, and looked at him: there was a half-smile on her face, a soft gladness was in her eyes. All at once her expression changed; she thrust the kneeling figure away from her, and stood upright.

‘I had forgotten,’ she said, ‘in the joy of seeing you I had forgotten.’

Her voice had grown hard, and her face was half turned away.

‘Forgotten? What?’

The man spoke gently, yet with faltering tone.

‘That time — eleven years ago. You knew — they told me you knew ; and besides — you could not but hear and know.’

‘Yes, I knew.’ The words came grudgingly. ‘As you say, I could not but know.’

‘And—did you believe it—them, the horrible things they said? or—me?’

The woman had turned to him again : she shrank from him, yet, as she asked her question, was compelled to look for the answer in his face : her eyes, full of fear and horror, could not but meet his eyes. He answered her :

‘I am still your son.’

She drew a little nearer to him, her hands outstretched ; her voice was beseeching now.

‘Then, Jim, you did not believe it?’

‘If I had believed it I should not have been here now.’

A low sigh broke from Lucy Hatherden’s lips, and slowly the shrinking terror faded from her face. She drew close to her son, looking up into his eyes with a strange, imploring look ; then she raised her hands and clasped them round his neck, and let her head sink forward on his breast. Jim Saryll reverently and tenderly kissed the bent head, and folded his arms about her as a lover might have done.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE next morning Jim Saryll wrote to his grandfather, and in a few days received in reply a few bitter words, telling him that the old man never wished to see his face again. He had expected such an answer ; yet the answer grieved him ; and his newly-found joy was clouded by thoughts of the man who, in his own way, had been kind to him so long.

A month went by, and he was still a guest at Little Hollow. After the first fortnight, he had said each morning that he ought to go away the next, yet lingered on while the days grew longer and the sunbeams brighter, and all the world moved on towards the fulness of the year.

To Lucy Hatherden the month was a month that was unreal in the intensity of happiness that coloured every day. Each evening, when the shadows, stealing over the hills, saddened the beauty of the June world, she said to herself, doubtful and half afraid : ‘Can it have really passed, the evil?’ Each morning, as the new day rose strong and bright with hope, she answered herself : ‘It has surely passed;’ yet even while she proclaimed the joy that walked with her to be real, felt the reality to be a dream.

At last there came a morning when Jim Saryll, with an open letter in his hand, said that the time had really come. He had just come back from the village, and was leaning against the tree under which he and his mother had first met ; his hat was pushed to the back of his head ; his throat was bare ; his sunburnt face was both hot and rueful. Lucy sat near him in a low chair ; Dinah, on a rug stretched on the

grass, played with a little kitten on her lap. The day was hot and still; the hum of insects filled the air; and the smell of new-mown hay mingled with the scent of roses and lilies in the well-tended garden-beds.

‘Who is the letter from?’ asked Lucy.

‘From the agent at Raynfold. He says that now I am in England again at last, I ought at least to go and have a look at the place, that the tenants want to see me, and—oh a long rigmarole. I suppose I shall have to go.’

‘Of course you will have to go. It is a fine property; you hardly remember it, I suppose; but you will find that you have a beautiful home. It will be your home, Jim?’

‘I hope so, but I don’t know yet. If it is, it will be yours too—your second home.’

‘No, I shall never go there again.’

‘Why not, mother?’

It was Dinah who spoke, looking up wonderingly.

‘You will have to come,’ said Jim in a low tone, ‘to show the world that you and I are mother and son.’

Lucy answered Dinah.

‘You remember once that we spoke of the many different worlds there are. The world that I lived in when I lived at Raynfold, is a world I want never to enter again.’

‘You neither shall nor can enter it,’ said Jim ; ‘it is passed away, dissolved, buried. I will make a new world there—if I can get the help I want, and you shall come and see how fair it will be.’

His eyes looked down at Dinah as he spoke. Lucy answered him, working diligently at the piece of embroidery in her hands :

‘I think it will be fair, I think that love will build a new world for you, that will be new and fair indeed. But not for me.

You cannot put a new house where the old house stands, you cannot make new fields and roads and trees ; to me in your new world there would always be a ghost.'

'You are wrong,' said Jim, with something of sternness in his tone, 'you are wrong to look back. Look forward ; there are no ghosts on ahead.'

'They walk not before or behind, but by my side,' said Lucy under her breath ; then she looked up and smiled. 'There have been no ghosts since you have come,' she said ; 'you have laid them all.'

'Yes, and they shall not rise again.'

Jim Saryll sat down on the grass by Dinah's side.

'Do you know,' he said, 'that there is a stranger in Sleepy Dale—at least there was an hour ago ; actually a stranger, and I had forgotten to tell you ?'

'Are you sure he was a stranger ?' asked Dinah. 'There are several people you have never seen in Sleepy Dale.'

‘He wore a tail coat and a tall, shiny hat. Is not that enough?’

‘Mr. Hargreaves has a tail coat. But you know Mr. Hargreaves.’

‘Yes, I know Mr. Hargreaves, and it certainly was not he; he, I take it, could not have got into the clothes of the gentleman in question, who was of a less-developed figure—though showing promise of a stout old age too.’

‘It is not often that strangers come here,’ said Dinah. ‘I only remember one before you.’

‘Do you call me a stranger?’

‘Not now; but you were the day I met you on the beach.’

‘What a number of strangers the world must hold for you!’

‘It holds nothing else but strangers and strange things,’ said Lucy. ‘If ever Dinah’s fate takes her away from Sleepy Dale, everything she sees and does will have at least the merit of being new.’

‘Would you like to see new things, Dinah?’ Jim asked.

‘Yes, I suppose so, oh yes—yet not to leave the old.’

‘You are right,’ said Lucy; ‘you are safer with the old.’

‘Safer perhaps,’ said Jim, ‘but safety is not the only thing in life.’

‘It is a great deal.’

‘That depends upon one’s ideas of happiness. I don’t think many people would choose safety as the thing most to be desired in life. Would you, Dinah?’

‘I don’t know; I don’t know what it feels like, not to be safe.’

‘What is the thing you like best in life?’ asked Lucy.

Dinah thought a minute.

‘Living,’ she answered, ‘the feeling that I am alive.’

‘By Jove!’ exclaimed Jim suddenly, ‘speak of the stranger and you see his hat.’

Look, Dinah, quick, did you ever see anything so shiny in all Sleepy Dale ?'

Both Lucy and Dinah looked up. Just outside the gate in the road a man was standing, gazing in at the group under the tree.

'What does the fellow mean by staring in like that ?' Jim went on. He sprang to his feet. 'I think I'll go and ask him.'

Lucy put her hand upon his arm.

'No, don't go.'

'Why not ? He wants a hint on manners.'

'Mother,' said Dinah, 'I believe it is the same man who was here before.'

'It is the same man. He may want to see me. Stay here, Jim ; I will go.'

Lucy walked down to the gate.

'Who is the man ? asked Jim.

'He is the other stranger,' answered Dinah, 'the one I said came before you. He was here about two months ago to see mother on business.'

‘What sort of business?’

‘I don’t know. I had to go out just when he came, and by the time I came back he was gone. I was so sorry.’

‘I can’t see why you should be sorry.’

‘Because he came from London. I like seeing strangers.’

‘Even a common-looking fellow like that? You did not flatter me, Dinah, when you said you were glad I had come. All strangers are alike to you, then, so long only as they are strangers?’

Dinah shook her head gently, but she did not speak.

Lucy Hatherden came slowly back from the gate. Jim went to meet her.

‘What did he want?’

‘Nothing. He has come down for change of air, he says, having taken a fancy to the place when he was here before.’

‘He came to see you on business, Dinah says.’

‘ Yes, nothing much ; he acts as a sort of agent for some money I give away. I have more than I need, you know.’

Jim Saryll put his hands on his mother’s shoulders, and looked down at her face.

‘ You are pale, mother. What is it ? If that man——’

‘ No, no Jim, it is only that he reminds me of that world we spoke of, the world I wish never to enter again.’

Lucy raised her downcast eyes, and as Jim looked into them, he thought of Dinah’s words : ‘ Her eyes have a look half frightened and half brave.’

‘ Do not let us speak of him,’ Lucy said ; ‘ he is one of the ghosts.’

CHAPTER IX.

THE next morning Jim Saryll went away, and there was a feeling of loneliness at Little Hollow. It seemed as though the weather mourned his going, for the summer sky was clouded with gray clouds, and a drizzling rain fell during the earlier part of the day. Inside the house Dinah began to think that the mere fact of being alive was not after all the best thing in life ; and Lucy Hatherden, restless and gloomy, felt within her heart a sense of coming evil that seemed to gather strength from the dreariness outside.

In the afternoon the clouds began to drift asunder, and the rain ceased. Lucy came

into the hall where Dinah was sitting, trying to read, and said :

‘It is not raining now. I think I will go and see Aunt Anne ; I have not been to see her for so long.’

Dinah started up, and went to the open window.

‘Isn’t it raining ? No, it is quite fine. May I go with you, mother ?’

‘No, I think not. I would rather you went to meet your father. I may not be back in time to go.’

‘Very well ; it is too early yet though — unless I go right into Barhaven and wait at the library till he is ready to come.’

‘You might do that.’

‘I think I will ; I am tired of being indoors. When are you going, mother ?’

‘Directly ; as soon as I have put my hat on.’

A few minutes later, Lucy and Dinah Hatherden went together out of the garden gate. Dinah went slowly up the side of

the long green hill : Lucy took her way towards the village. She walked quickly, finding a certain pleasure in rapid movement, and refreshed by the low breeze, sweet and cool after the rain. She slackened her pace as she drew near to the little house by the sea, and looked at her watch.

‘Half an hour and ten minutes,’ she said. ‘Twenty minutes to reach the point ; I must stay twenty minutes here.’

Anne Hatherden greeted her in her usual impassive way.

‘Sit down,’ she said, but with no show of cordiality. ‘You would seem to have been walking fast?’

‘I don’t know ; yes, I suppose I came along rather quickly ; it is so much cooler after the rain.’

‘The rain has stopped then?’

‘Yes, I am glad to say, though I suppose it was wanted.’

‘No doubt rain was wanted, seeing the Lord sent rain.’

‘How is your rheumatism, Anne?’

‘Better, thank you, better than the last time you were here.’

‘It is some time since I have been here,’ said Lucy, with something of apology in her tone; ‘but the last month—you know I have had my son?’

‘Yes, I know. Is he still at Little Hollow?’

‘He went away this morning.’

Anne Hatherden looked across at her sister-in-law.

‘I only saw him that one morning. He has a look of you, but still his face is different to your face.’

‘It is a better face than mine, a handsomer and a better face than mine.’

‘It pleased me better. I don’t go by good looks, but it pleased me better.’

‘You are candid.’

‘I speak the truth : that’s what I hold to.’
There was a short silence.

‘Joel is quite well again,’ said Lucy pre-

sently ; ‘ he has got rid of his cold at last, I think.’

‘ It was bad when he was over to see me last week. I gave him some aniseed tea before he went away ; he told me he hadn’t had any.’

‘ Is aniseed tea good for a cold ? I didn’t know.’

‘ Joel’s always been used to aniseed tea when he’s had a cold.’

‘ I wish I had known ; he never told me. I got him some medicine from Barhaven, but it didn’t seem to do him much good.’

‘ Joel’s not used to new-fangled remedies.’

Again there was a silence : the one woman worked away steadily, the other glanced furtively at her watch. By-and-by Anne spoke.

‘ There’s a stranger in the village, lodging at Churchwarden Hargreaves’. Do you know who he is ?’

‘ No, hardly——’

‘ Yet he said he knew you.’

‘He said he knew me? Have you spoken to him?’

‘He passed by here this morning and stopped and asked if there was a way along the shore. He said he knew you.’

Aunt Anne’s keen eyes were fixed on the face a few yards away. Lucy returned her gaze steadily.

‘I never saw him till about two months ago,’ she answered. ‘His mother was a servant of mine long ago.’

She rose to her feet.

‘I must be going now.’

‘You are in a hurry.’

‘No, not exactly, but I have not walked much lately, and I want to take a walk along the shore before I go home again.’

‘Is it well to walk so much?’ Anne asked, coming nearer. ‘You look but poorly to-day; I can’t think but what you’d be better if you stayed indoors more, as women was meant to do.’

‘Oh, I am quite well,’ Lucy answered, with a little laugh, ‘and walking suits me, I know ; I get restless if I am much in the house.’

‘Restless!’ Aunt Anne looked searchingly at the woman before her. ‘Lucy Hatherden, you will be restless always till you have made your peace with the Lord.’

‘How can I make peace? What do you mean by making peace?’

‘If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. Repent and confess ; fall down before the Lord ; and in His mercy maybe He will grant you grace.’

Lucy answered in a whisper.

‘I have nothing to confess.’

Anne Hatherden’s voice grew stern with reproof.

‘You speak blasphemy. Nothing to confess? You that belongs to the world, that’s given up to vanity’—she pointed to the light summer gown that Lucy wore—

‘that has your heart filled full of earthly love, that sets all your hopes on this life? you say that you have nothing to confess? The best of us are sinners, and you are not amongst the best.’

Lucy sighed. ‘It is true,’ she said, ‘I dare say it is all true. I am not good; I was never taught to be good; I have never been religious like you.’

She walked slowly across the room and out of the door; she paused for an instant on the step.

‘Good-bye,’ she said; but Anne did not answer, and she went on with languid steps towards the shore.

Anne Hatherden stood at the door and watched her as she went.

‘I have warned her,’ she muttered, ‘I have put the truth before her: her lost soul can have no claim upon my soul.’

She stood and watched the retreating figure till it disappeared behind the cliffs.

Lucy Hatherden went slowly for a little way, then she took out her watch and looked at it, and walked on with hurried pace. All along the lonely shore the scattered rocks lay bare, for the tide was low, and a wide belt of seaweed-covered sand stretched between the shingle and the sea. At Love's End Point a little zigzag path ran through the chain of rocks; it was nearly dry now, and Lucy, following it, soon rounded the narrow point. The point that appeared to run out so far, seen from the side that looked towards Sleepy Dale, seemed on the further side hardly a point at all, for the cliffs curved back again barely a dozen yards, and so ran in a straight line for half a mile or more, when again they bent out towards the sea. The long, shallow bay thus formed, was filled with deep water when the tide was full : when the tide was out it had a solitary desolate look. Few people cared to walk beneath its cliffs, for in the country round it was

held that ill luck hung about it, and it was said that long ago two lovers had been caught there by the tide and drowned.

To-day a man paced to and fro beneath the cliffs : he came towards Lucy as she appeared round the point.

‘ You are late.’

‘ I am a little late. I cannot stay long. What is it you have to say ?’

‘ You must know pretty well.’

‘ Is your mother still alive ?’

The man answered with a sort of sullen impatience.

‘ Of course she’s still alive. Why shouldn’t she be ?’

‘ You said she was so ill when you were here before.’

‘ Well, she’s better. We may as well walk on a bit, instead of standing here ; I’ve got chilled waiting about.’

Without reply Lucy moved forward along the desolate shore, and Martin Wace walked by her side.

An hour later she stood alone near Love's End Point ; her hands hung limp beside her ; her head was a little bent ; she looked towards the sea. The tide was coming in now, slowly and peacefully ; it had just touched the extreme end of the line of rocks beyond the point ; soon it would touch the point itself, for it rolled in rapidly after it reached the rocks. Lucy watched it till the slow waves, breaking gently, had crept nearly to her feet ; then she started and moved back, and set off quickly towards the point. The little pathway by which she had come was covered with water now ; she had to climb the jagged mass of rocks, and reached with difficulty the safe, broad beach beyond. She turned and looked back.

‘To have been shut in there would have meant death,’ she thought. ‘It seems to be everywhere ; it follows me.’

The summer day was brightening as it drew towards its close ; a glow of evening

light gave beauty to the bare stretch of shore; the waves were silvery as they splashed gently on the beach. But Lucy Hatherden, walking back to Sleepy Dale, did not know whether the light was full or faint; her thoughts were busy in a world of fear, and the outside world was dim to her.

‘To have been shut in there alone with death,’ she was thinking, ‘to see the waves come nearer and nearer’—she shuddered as she thought of the narrow bay with the steep cliffs rising high, and the sea drawing surely towards them. ‘And yet it would be better—the quiet death there, with the waves creeping up, it would be better than that other death, the cruel, helpless misery of being killed by men!’

CHAPTER X.

THERE was a prayer-meeting in Barhaven. The Vicar of Barhaven was in the chair, and conducted the opening service, but the address was given by a preacher from London. He took for his text the words : ‘The wrath to come’; and he spoke at length, first of the wickedness of the world, and then of the punishment which that wickedness must meet with. The preacher was not a cultured nor a very well educated man; his similes were often incorrect, his words not always well chosen; but there was a certain graphic force and picturesqueness in all he said, and he had the power of attracting and keeping his hearers’ attention. Through all the hour during which he

spoke, no sign of weariness or impatience was shown by the men and women who filled the benches; and chief amongst those who listened with most eager interest was Anne Hatherden. She sat near the front of the room, and her hungry eyes rarely left the speaker's face; only now and again they wandered towards a bench at right angles to her own. On this bench sat Joel, his head slightly bent, his gentle face thoughtful and interested; and when any warning or statement of the preacher seemed to Anne particularly terrible or stirring, she glanced rapidly towards him. But by-and-by the glances ceased; the preacher's manner became yet more earnest, his language more forcible as he neared the end of his address; and Anne Hatherden's attention became absorbed in his bold picture of the wrath to come. She sat with a sort of triumph on her face and a light in her fixed eyes; it was good to think of the destruction that would come

upon the enemies of the Lord ; and she was on the Lord's side. She hardly joined in the closing hymn or heard the closing prayer ; the excitement and the triumph were still strong within her ; and the longing in her heart that the Lord would hasten His coming was a longing that was too intense to come forth in singing or utter itself in speech.

Outside in the darkness Joel was waiting for her ; and side by side, silently at first, they passed through the narrow streets and beyond the town along the deserted road that led to Little Hollow. It was Anne who spoke first.

‘ You are alone to-night, Joel.’

‘ Yes. Lucy is not quite well, and Dinah stayed with her.’

‘ It's a pity they didn't come—both her and Dinah.’

‘ Yes, if she had been well. She has not been strong lately.’

The brother and sister walked on a few

yards in silence. The night air was warm and soft about them ; above the sky was clouded ; but the faint light that lies in the horizon always on summer nights made the way seem not wholly dark.

‘ Did you like the preacher ? ’ asked Joel at last.

‘ Yes, I liked him ; it was real preaching. He spoke good words, words of truth, and words of warning, words that’d have done good to many a one as wasn’t there to hear them.’

‘ The room was full,’ said Joel.

Anne did not answer. They had branched off from the road now, and were climbing the steep slope, at the top of which Lucy had stood when she had spoken to Joel for the first time.

‘ Joel,’ said Anne abruptly, ‘ did the preacher reach your heart to-night ? ’

‘ I think so.’ Joel spoke with the slight hesitation that often caused his words to linger, especially when he spoke to

Anne. 'I'm mostly stirred when they get to talk of judgment. It's a terrible thought !'

'It's a grand thought ; terrible to the Lord's enemies, but grand to those that's on His side. Don't let it be terrible to you, Joel !' Anne Hatherden stopped and put her hand upon her brother's arm : in the darkness Joel seemed to feel the strong spirit that sat behind her eyes pierce down into his soul. 'Don't let it be terrible to you,' she repeated. 'Brother, come over and stand on the side of the Lord !'

'I'm not against Him—knowingly,' said Joel.

'Those that's not with Him are against Him, and you can't care much for the cause of the Lord if there's a woman fills your heart. She's your wife, and I'm not going to say aught against her ; but you've been different from the time she come to Sleepy Dale, and it—it's hard to me to think she's caused you to fall away.'

Anne walked on as she spoke, and Joel followed her.

‘I don’t know about falling away,’ he said presently; ‘I’ve never been used to feeling sure about myself—even at the time when you were best pleased with me. But as to Lucy, it doesn’t appear to me that there’s quite good reason in what you say.’

‘I’m not one to argue,’ said Anne; ‘what I say, I say for your good; some day, maybe, you’ll find I’m right.’

‘She’s my wife,’ Joel went on, ‘and it’s no sin to keep the love of her in my heart. The love of a fellow-creature doesn’t go to show that you can’t be wishful to serve the Lord—so long as it’s not a wrong kind of love.’

‘Is it a right love that changes all your nature?’

Joel waited a little before he answered.

‘It seems to me,’ he said, ‘that a love, if it was big, would always change a man’s nature, and if it was a true love and a right

one, it would change it all the more. One thing is, it gives you a sort of protecting feeling, and that's what I'd never been used to, so I dare say it makes me seem different. Only not worse, Anne; if I'm worse than I used to be, it's not because of the love, but in spite of it.'

'You are blinded,' said Anne, 'and it is not given to me to open your eyes—yet: I must still go on bearing the pain and the dread I have borne so many years. But at the last, before the very last, before it's too late, maybe you will see.'

'I would please you if I could,' said Joel, 'but to turn against my wife—that I cannot do.'

But Anne went on as though she had not heard him.

'It's the only thing I have asked of God,' she said; 'through all these years I have asked nothing but only that He will give me your soul. And surely He will hear me!'

Little Hollow was close at hand now, and the brother and sister walked on without further speech till they had reached the garden gate.

‘I suppose it’s no good to ask you in,’ said Joel; ‘or will you let me walk home with you?’

‘I can walk home alone. Good-night.’

‘Good-night.’

Anne Hatherden walked on, her tall black figure invisible in the blackness of the night. Joel lingered a few minutes by the gate.

Presently a voice called to him from the house :

‘Is that you, Joel?’

‘Yes, it’s me.’

Lucy came out of the door, and down the path towards him.

‘I thought I heard the gate, but that was a minute or two ago. What a long time you have been away!’

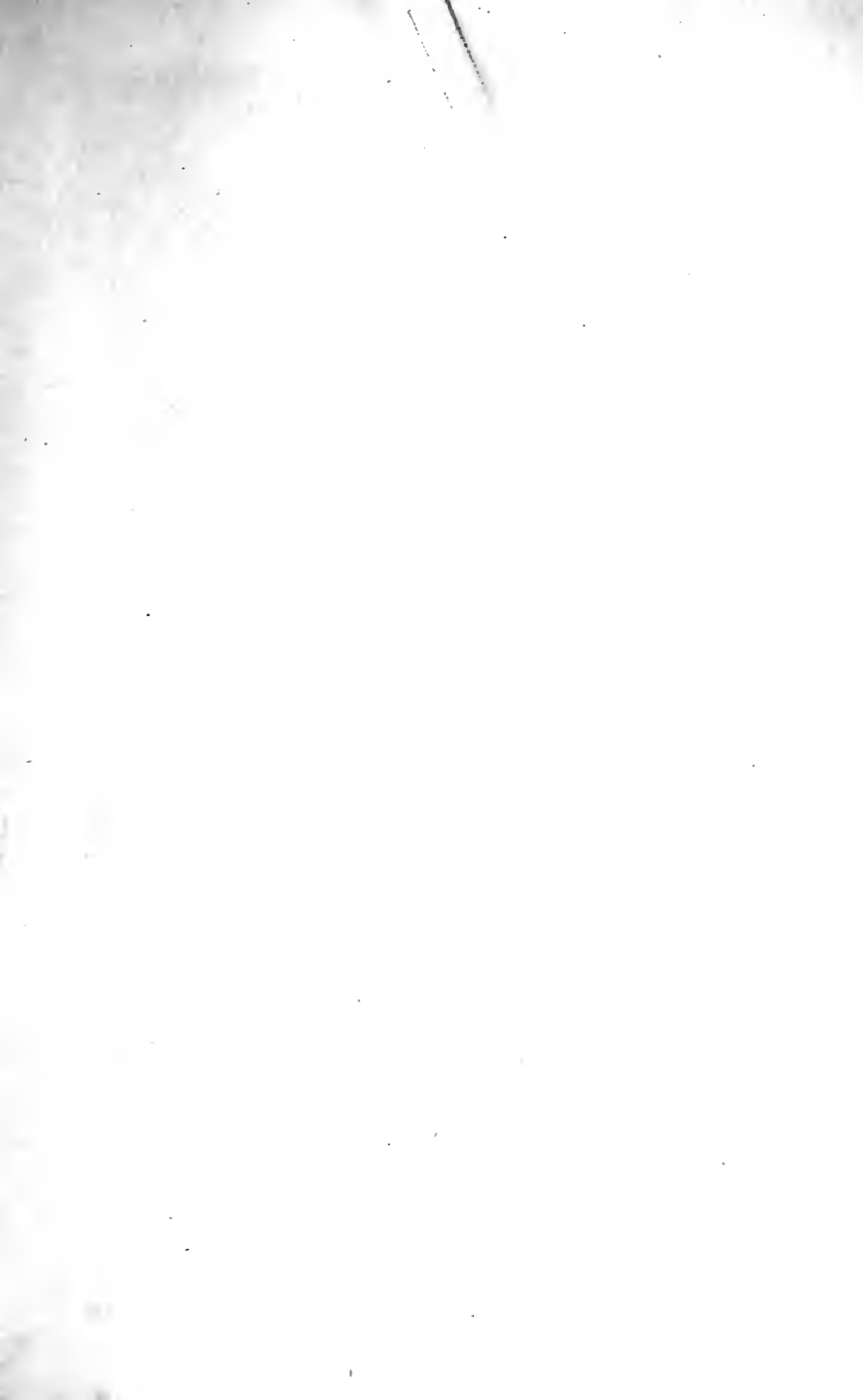
‘Has it seemed long? How are you, Lucy?’

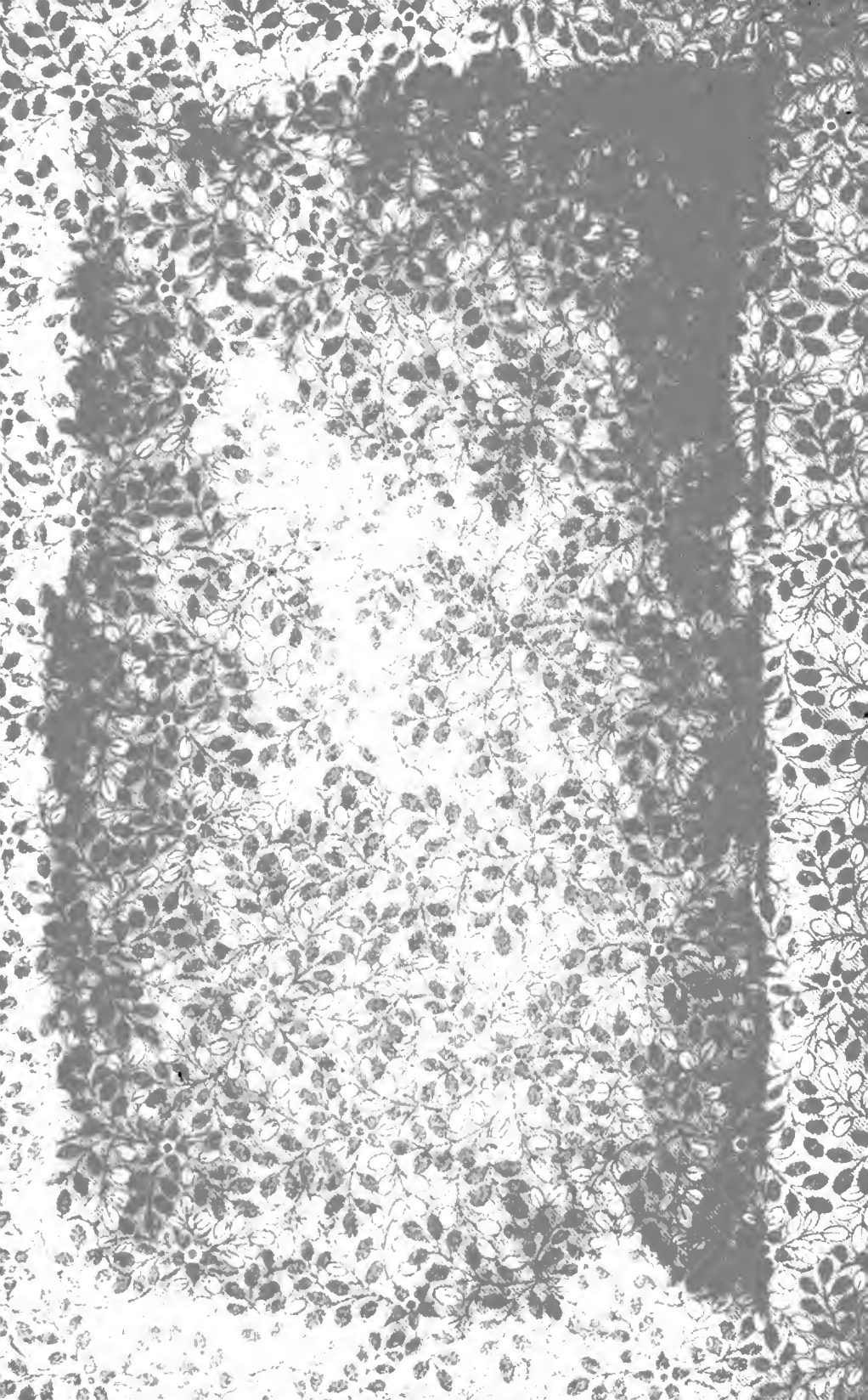
‘ Better, I think. Yes, the time seemed long ; it is always lonely when you are away. I miss you, Joel.’

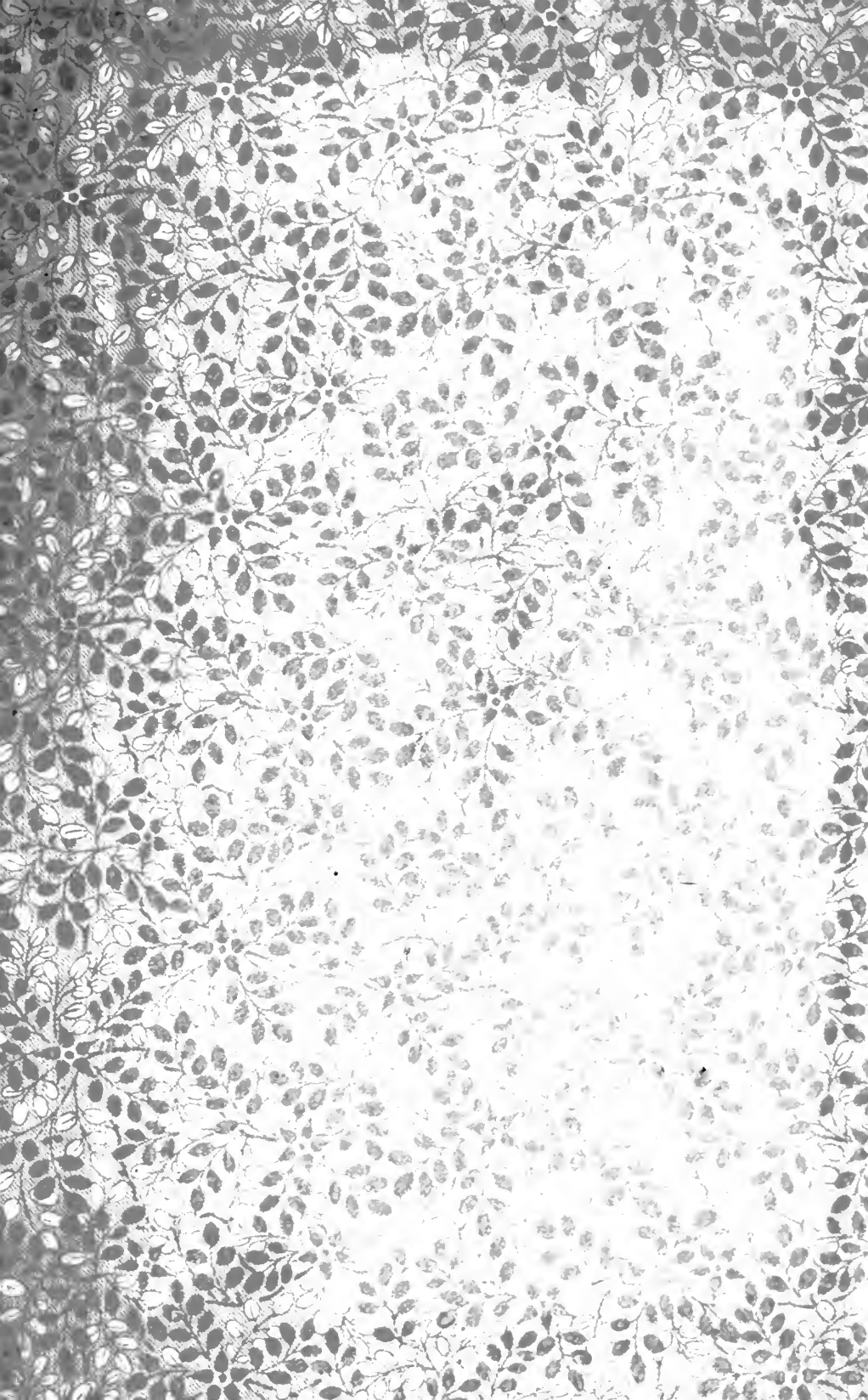
For answer Joel took his wife’s hand and drew it within his arm, and they walked together up the path and into the house.

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